

“Do You Know What is Inscribed on the Liberty Bell?”

Leviticus 25: 8-13

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Do you know what is inscribed on the Liberty Bell? **“Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.”** That quote was taken from Leviticus 25:10 and was a part of the instructions about the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee was a time of new beginnings. It occurred every fifty years when all debts were forgiven and land returned to the original owners.

I know we find this idea rather bizarre in our capitalistic society, but it had a purpose in ancient times. It made it possible for someone struggling under a load of debt to be liberated and it kept the Israelites from becoming too attached to the things of this world. Everything belonged to God and they were stewards. There was a danger in becoming too possessive. The Year of Jubilee reminded them of that.

So, in the middle of the paragraph that described the Year of Jubilee were these words, **“Proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.”** I don’t know if the makers of the Liberty Bell understood all the details of the Year of Jubilee, but they understood the value and importance of freedom and wanted that bell to remind people of it. For over two hundred years it has proclaimed that message, even in its silence. It has done it again today, hasn’t it?

On this Sunday before the Fourth of July, we have assembled to worship God and thank Him for the gift of freedom. We have had a grand celebration because as Americans and Christians, we enjoy freedom on two levels, physical and spiritual. We are most fortunate and grateful. Let me explain.

The first level of freedom we celebrate today is the freedom we enjoy as Americans. Our national freedom provides us with **opportunities** to pursue and fulfill our dreams. We live in a land that encourages all its citizens to dream, explore and soar to unlimited heights. What a contrast there is between America and other countries that have been in the news lately, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Cuba and China. No wonder we celebrate the Fourth of July every year. We must never take this level of freedom for granted.

Last week I visited the Carter Center to see an original copy of the Declaration of Independence. On July 4, 1776, after approving the final text of the Declaration of Independence, the Second Continental Congress voted that copies of the Declaration be printed, authenticated and rushed to every quarter of the new nation. That night, Philadelphia printer John Dunlap produced two hundred copies.

Only twenty-five copies remain and twenty-four are in museums around the country. The copy at the Carter Center is on a three-and-half year cross-country tour that will enable millions to see it.

When I went to see this copy of the Declaration of Independence, I was moved for two reasons. First of all, it was touching to view a document that was two hundred twenty six years old. What I viewed was printed the night our independence began. That’s a history major’s dream.

Secondly, The words of the Declaration are gripping. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Who can read this and not swell with pride and gratitude for this “Land of Opportunity?” I sure can’t.

The second level of freedom we celebrate today is the freedom we enjoy as Christians. While our nation provides us unparalleled opportunities to pursue our dreams, our faith provides us with the **ability** to make these dreams come true. Opportunity without ability leads to great frustration. This is why our faith is so important to us.

Our faith helps us to achieve our dreams in two ways. It liberates us from those things that would hold us back, low self-esteem, fear, guilt, grief, ignorance, negative attitudes, bad habits, selfishness, unhealthy relationships, hatred and revenge.

In his novel, Texas, James Michener has Cabeza de Vaca say, “You know, Lad, men are often imprisoned by the chains of their own forging.” How sad and true. Our faith, however, liberates us from the chain making business and strips us of those things that hold us back. No wonder we worship God and celebrate freedom. What a gift!

Our faith helps us in another way, though. It also provides the confidence and courage we need to take risks and pursue dreams. It is never easy to “go where no man has gone before,” at least where we have never been. It’s frightening and foreboding. It takes a lot of fortitude, determination, will-power and perseverance to be a pioneer. Where does a person obtain these traits? Listen to Paul, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” Philippians 4:13.

That is the motto of my good friend, Mr. Ward Correll. I have heard him quote that scripture on many occasions. I am sure he will again on July 27 at a banquet in his honor. That night, he will receive the Chandler Foundation’s “Kenutckian of the Year Award.” When he receives this award, he will join the ranks of Dr. William DeVries, renowned heart surgeon, country singer Loretta Lynn, and actor George Clooney and his aunt, Rosemary Clooney. This award is given annually to the most outstanding citizen of the Commonwealth. This year’s recipient certainly deserves this honor.

Mr. Correll grew up on a farm outside of Somerset and was one of twelve children born to Charles and Clara Alice Correll. While his family had a lot of love, they did not have an abundance of material resources. Ward was born during the depression and life was a struggle to say the least.

At the age of five, Mr. Correll knew that he wanted to make a lot of money and had visions that he would. His reason for wanting to make money was not a selfish one, though. He wanted to be wealthy so that he could help people with his resources.

I know others have had that same altruistic motive and lost sight of their goal. This did not happen to Ward. That goal has been his driving force and steady compass. As a result, today Mr. Correll owns over two hundred businesses.

Mr. Correll is not being recognized for his business acumen, though, but his generosity. Over the years, Mr. Correll has helped more people through difficult times than anyone I know. Most of his day is consumed with listening to people’s heartbreaking stories and finding ways to help them get back on their feet. In addition, he has helped churches, schools, colleges and youth organizations of all kinds. The list of organizations that owe their existence to him would be phenomenal.

How has Mr. Correll been able to do all of this, especially given his humble beginnings? He would quickly tell you two reasons. **America gave him the opportunity and God gave him the ability.** What a combination!

Today, we have celebrated our freedom as Americans and Christians and worshiped the God who has given it to us. He has certainly been good to all of us. Let us renew our commitment to use our opportunities and freedom to make the world a better place. That, in turn, would give Him a reason to celebrate!