

FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“A Freedom Worth Cherishing”

Scripture Lesson: Mark 6: 1-13

*This sermon was preached by Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on Sunday, July 6, 2025
at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Mark 6: 1-13

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

1 He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house.” 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, “Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” 12 So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. 13 They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

A Freedom Worth Cherishing

Leader: The word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Years ago, a grandfather gave his granddaughter a crisp two-dollar bill and told her, “Now don’t spend this all in one place. This is special. This is something to cherish.”

The little girl looked puzzled. “Why is it special?”

Her grandfather smiled and said, “Because nobody uses them anymore. One day, it might be worth something.” So she tucked it away in a memory box under her bed.

Twenty years later, she came across that same two-dollar bill—still crisp, still unspent. She smiled, not because of its monetary value (it was still worth exactly \$2), but because, to her, it was precious. It reminded her of someone who loved her. She cherished it not for what it was worth, but because of who had given it.

Many of us have something like that—an object whose value isn’t measured in dollars, but in a different kind of equity: a relationship... a memory.

I have with me this morning one of my most prized possessions—a knitted wool cap. It’s not flashy. I sometimes wear it when I do yard work.

I cherish it because my grandfather wore it when he worked in the yard (shirtless, shoeless, khaki shorts—and this cap), often, as I recall, painstakingly removing stickers from his lawn with a homemade square template. To me, this cap is just this side of a holy relic.

Speaking of holy relics, the stole I'm wearing today was given to me by Chaplain John Espy Watts Jr., a World War II Navy chaplain and longtime member of Second Presbyterian Church in Charleston, which was the church of my youth. When Chaplain Watts learned I was discerning a call to the ministry, he gave me his stoles.

This one has certainly seen better days—as you can see, it is tattered and worn—but it is rich with meaning.

It was worn in the Pacific, and really all over... and I wonder how many sailors, in moments of fear and desperation, looked upon the man who first wore this stole and found hope and grace? I cherish it, not because of how it looks, but because of what it represents—service, sacrifice, freedom.

On this Sunday closest to Independence Day, it is good and fitting that we remember those who have served and who continue to serve the cause of freedom—not to mention the many men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice: “who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life.”

It is right to give thanks and praise to God for the freedom we enjoy. I mean, there are places in the world today where gathering to worship Jesus would be to risk one's life!

Our church family was begun in the year of our Lord 1731, when twelve Scottish families felt called to leave the Circular Congregational Church and establish a new church—a new Kirk—and they were able to do that because of the religious liberty that has been woven into the fabric of our republic.

For such religious freedom, many people came to America. They didn't have to worry about having to attend the church of the majority or the church of the king. They could worship freely and without fear of persecution... and, praise be to God, so can we. Indeed, we are blessed to cherish our religious liberty.

Now, as Reformed Christians, we know that to cherish something means more than just giving thanks. It is so much more than sentimental nostalgia. To cherish something is to take care of it, to nurture it, to take responsibility for it.

Ronald Reagan once said, “Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction.”

I suspect that the same can be said about truth and justice and most anything else we might value. And so, the question isn't “What do we cherish?” as much as it is, “How do we take care of it?”

Our Scripture lessons this morning help us better understand what it means to cherish, to love, and to lead.

Keith read for us this morning from 2 Samuel 5, and in it, we encounter a decisive moment in Israel's history. David had ruled the southern tribes for seven and a half years, but now the northern tribes came to him at Hebron.

It was a moment of transition, to be sure. This was, after all, following years of conflict and division... and yet they found in that moment something worth cherishing.

I dare say that sometimes it takes painful moments to make us stop and think about what truly matters.

I'm sure that for the people in Texas who were devastated by the recent flooding, their minds are not preoccupied with past grievances, or someone's reputation, or a political affiliation.

As that grieving community continues to deal with incredible pain and loss, theirs has also become a living witness to how cherishing something can become a matter of doing something—and because they

cherish life deeply, they stand together firmly, as they search, and grieve, and bury their loved ones... and eventually heal.

For the gathered community at Hebron, that is what they focused on as well—their community, their solidarity as the people of God. And listen again to what they said to David about their relationship: “We are your bone and flesh.”

In saying that, they acknowledge not just David’s leadership, but their shared identity. They were, after all, the people of God. What’s more, they confirm God’s call that David would shepherd the people of Israel.

One of the things we notice about this moment is that it isn’t defined by conquest; it is defined by covenant.

David becomes king through relationship, trust, and covenantal faithfulness, and he accepts the role of a ruler who is entrusted with the welfare of God’s people.

The Bible teaches that leadership in Israel, as it is in the church, is to be understood as a special gift—a sacred trust—one that is grounded in humility, oriented around service, and wholly dependent on God.

The Bible tells us, “David became greater and greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.”

In other words, the real source of David’s greatness was not his personal strength or clever politics; it was God’s presence. That’s what made the biggest difference in David’s life!

It begs the question: In our day, in our homes, our churches, and our public life, what kind of leadership do we cherish?

Do we long for strength for the sake of strength? Or do we value the kind of leadership that serves with a shepherd’s heart, walks with people, and seeks God’s presence in their life?

To cherish freedom, faith, leadership, or anything else of value... is to nurture it. Here again, it’s not enough to be thankful—we must also be faithful!

And yet, as we see in our Gospel lesson from Mark 6, not everyone cherishes what truly matters. When Jesus returned to his hometown, instead of receiving a hero’s welcome, he is met with skepticism and rejection.

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” they mutter. And Mark tells us, “They took offense at him.”

It’s one of the saddest moments in the Gospels. Those people who knew Jesus best—they failed to recognize him for who he really was.

And why? Perhaps he didn’t meet their expectations. Perhaps he challenged their assumptions. Maybe he didn’t fit into the box they had built for him.

I dare say, sometimes we act the same way, don’t we? In fact, one of the greatest threats to the American church today isn’t persecution... it’s complacency—a kind of spiritual blindness.

Like the people of Nazareth, we can become so familiar with Jesus that we stop listening to him. We end up cherishing an image of Christ, but not his call.

Ah, but Jesus doesn’t give up. Instead, he expands his mission. He sends out the twelve, two by two—not with stuff, but with trust.

He tells them to “take nothing for their journey except a staff.” “No bread. No bag. No money in their belts.” Just sandals, a tunic, a staff... and a calling.

The disciples travel light so they can move quickly. They rely on the hospitality of strangers and the providence of God.

They preached repentance. They healed the sick. They cast out demons. In a way, they too became greater, for the Lord, the God of hosts, was with them as well.

This morning, we will send out our Sr. High Mission Team in that same spirit, and like the disciples, they are not going out for goodness' sake—they go out for Christ's sake and because the love of Christ compels them to go. And they go not in their own strength, but in the power of God.

That should serve as a reminder to us that the more we cherish Christ, the more we will cherish the people that Christ set us free to love—and that is a freedom we can't afford to let slip through our fingertips: the freedom to glorify God, make disciples, and meet human need.

I sometimes wonder how many lives our church touches in a year through mission trips, Meals on Wheels, ministries like Star Gospel and LAMB, Bible studies, and youth groups.

The truth is, it's hard to count. And that's the point—because to cherish something is to live it, to share it!

God's grace is not given to us to hoard, any more than freedom is afforded to us so we can simply enshrine it. That's not how a legacy is intended to work.

A legacy works—it endures—when the next generation becomes the latest links in that venerable chain of witnesses and carries the legacy onward.

If we say, for example, that we have certain unalienable rights (rights that do not originate with us but have been given to us by our Creator), and if our Creator really is the one in whom we put our trust...

Then life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness cannot simply be words that appear on a declaration, nor can our affirmation "In God We Trust" simply be a statement on our currency...

Such foundational virtues must be evident in our witness, and expressed in the currency of our life.

The Rev. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister and signer of the Declaration of Independence, believed that a nation could not be well-governed without moral virtue, and that virtue must be rooted in true religion.

In one of his prayers, he asked God to "preside in the councils of our nation, inspire our public servants with wisdom and integrity, and bless the people with piety, peace, and prosperity."

And John Calvin (centuries before Witherspoon)—he reminded us that even the best governments must remain accountable to God. That they would be best served when they recognize that any authority they have has been granted unto them by God, and that God, in the end, is the final authority.

This is important for us to remember as Christians as well: that our truest identity is not a national identity, but a heavenly one.

There has been no time in our nation's history untouched by division or despair. But praise be to God, there has been no time when there has not also been Christ's Church. And ours is the business of both cherishing and championing that which is good and acceptable and holy.

In our Old Testament lesson this morning, David became great because the Lord was with him. And in our New Testament lesson, the disciples changed the world because Jesus sent them.

And as for us? Well, God is with us as well—and we too have been sent. Called and sent to cherish the things that matter the most: things like the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep, the gospel that sets us free to love, and the kingdom of heaven that is breaking into our world (even) now, by the favor of God—the grace that He continues to shed on us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.