

“True Freedom”  
Acts 2:42-47  
John 10:1-10

Madeleine Albright in her latest memoir, *Hell and Other Destinations: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

*Memoir*, retells the story of being detained by British Customs when she writes,

Pulled out of line, I was made to wait, then instructed by a guard using a clipped imperial accent to open my suitcases and each of the smaller bags within...Under my breath, I muttered, “Why me?” More minutes elapsed with the guards just standing around...I finally confronted my officious tormenters by pulling rank: “Do you know who I am?” There, I thought, that should do it. “No,” came the sympathetic reply, “But we have doctors here who can help you to figure that out.”<sup>1</sup>

You remember Jesus’ disciples when they huddled in the Upper Room following his resurrection, not really wanting to say to anyone, “Do you know who we are?” You remember Jesus appearing in the Upper room to the disciples saying, “Peace be with you!” denoting that God provides. You recall, two of the disciples walking to Emmaus and a stranger, who was Jesus, coming alongside the two and equipping them “...to put together the disparate experiences of life into a meaningful, coherent whole, to see a pattern and purpose in human history.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus helped them gather up the events of past weeks to create a coherent pattern of meaning. In the Upper Room and on the road to Emmaus, Jesus told each of the disciples who they were without them having to ask, “Do you know who we are?” Each disciple was a beloved child of God.

On this Fourth Sunday of Easter, because Jesus was raised from the dead, humanity has the opportunity to experience true freedom in knowing who they are and to whom they belong.

I’m captured by how Christians are responding to the shelter-in-place and reopening orders across our 50 states, each different and nothing uniform. Each order, however, is thoughtfully and diligently instituted by each of the 50 Governors. What Christians have in

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<sup>1</sup>Madeleine Albright with Bill Woodward, *Hell and Other Destinations: A 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Memoir* (New York City, New York: Harper, 2020), Nook Edition 9-10.

<sup>2</sup>John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 30.

common is our understanding of freedom. Yet, how we each understand and want to apply the freedom we have in Christ related to the Governors' desire to safeguard the health of 325 million people and jumpstart the economy is varied and many. In this regard, Barbara Brown Taylor, an Episcopal priest and the emerita Butman Professor of Religion at Piedmont College helps us understand the importance in how Christians speak and behave when she determined the content of a baccalaureate address writing,

After auditioning dozens of passages from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes that were full of universal wisdom, I decided to choose instead a piece of distinctly Christian wisdom. What better way to demonstrate that it was possible to speak from my own tradition without sounding triumphal or exclusive? At least I hoped I could do that, though it was up to my listeners to judge. Christians are not particularly gifted at knowing how we sound to others, especially in parts of the world where our voices are the loudest and most numerous.<sup>3</sup>

Remember, when you've met one Christian, you've only met one. We all do not share the same words and behaviors, but we do listen to the same Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

The texts in Acts 2:42-47 and John 10:1-10 declare that Jesus has established a common ground for all humanity. We are all free in Christ.

In Acts 2:42-47, our freedom in Christ is established through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Each person is wired to be in relationship with God, others and part of a community. Relationships and being in a community offers mutual support, an opportunity to be of one mind and heart and to hold all things in common.

In John 10:1-10 we learn that when we head toward Jesus' voice, we are transformed in some way, shape or form. John 10:9 reads, "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture." Placing your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and heeding his voice is instructive and freeing. However, there is another voice. It is deceptive and oppressive. Unlike the Good Shepherd, the thief only exists to steal and destroy. And when we succumb, by listening to that voice, the thief steals hope, peace, joy and love. The thief lies about what's important and who you are. What can we trust the Good Shepherd to do?

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<sup>3</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy* (New York, New York: HarperOne, 2019), 161.

To never lead us astray. What response does the Good Shepherd expect from us? To know the difference between his voice and that of the thief.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus, because of his resurrection, makes a real difference in real people, who live in a real world, who have real needs. And being born again is the key to experience life differently in relationship with others who want to heed the communal call from Jesus to live in an interconnected, interdependent and truly “free” way. Again, Barbara Brown Taylor, the author of *Holy Envy*, writes, referring to being born again,

No one knows where the Spirit comes from or where it goes. No one. This is a difficult teaching for those who want to feel secure in their relationship with God, especially if their security depends on knowing how things work. When and where is the Spirit present? Who has access to it and who does not? What does it mean to be born of the Spirit?... How can one be sure it has happened, and what are the consequences for those to whom it does not happen? Are they eligible for heaven or not? “You do not know,” Jesus says. Not because you are stupid, but because you are not God. So relax if you can, because you are not doing anything wrong. This is what it means to be human.<sup>5</sup>

God speaks to us through reading the Bible, praying and engaging others in the common journey of following Jesus. We know the difference between the voice of the Good Shepherd and the thief. God has a warm relationship with you. God loves you and wants you to love others with that same empathetic, listening, caring, loving and compassionate warmth. Each one of us can hear the communal call from Jesus, calling each one of us by name, and head toward his voice. Only in Christ is there true freedom.

When you’ve met one Christian, you have met exactly one. And, our best ways of thinking and speaking about God are provisional. Recognizing that the more others can experience Christians who define who a Christian is by what a Christian is for, as opposed to what a Christian is against, will certainly build good will.

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<sup>4</sup>In the three paragraphs of textual analysis, I have benefited from the thinking of Ian A. McFarland, Karoline M. Lewis, Margaret P. Aymer and Ruben Rosario Rodriguez in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery, Cynthia L. Rigby and Carolyn J. Sharp, editors, *Connections, Year A, Volume 2* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 241-243, 243-244, 251-253 and 253-254.

<sup>5</sup>Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy*, 167.

Let's seek a better way to live together by remembering, telling and living the way of Jesus. Hearing and listening to Jesus' voice is essential. You are a beloved child of God. What does true freedom look like? Develop your listening ear. Amen!

*This sermon was preached (Livestream due to the Coronavirus) on Sunday, 03 May 2020  
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