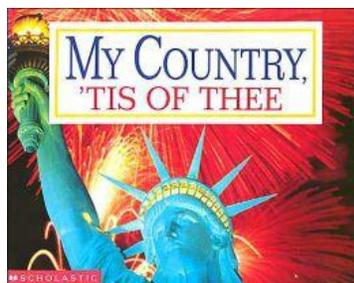


## Independence Day: July 4/5, 2015

*Slave to None, Subject to All*



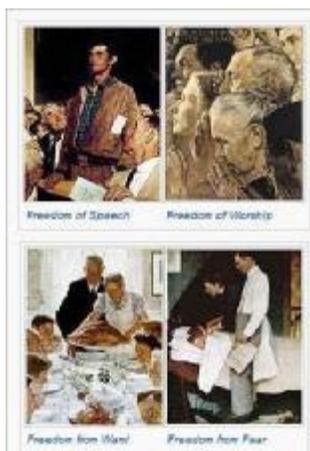
[show My country 'tis of thee]

of liberty, Of thee I sing;

Land where my fathers died, Land of the pilgrims' pride,

From ev'ry mountainside, Let freedom ring!

My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land



[show Four freedoms]

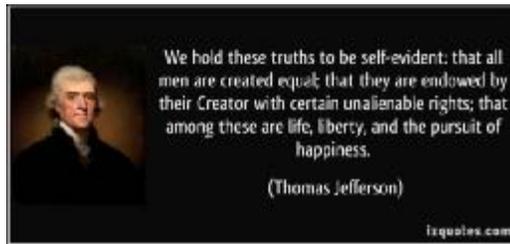
Freedom. It is the thread in the fabric of our country which we celebrate this weekend. FDR summarized this thread in his “Four Freedoms” speech in 1941. He proposed four fundamental freedoms that people “everywhere in the world” ought to enjoy: Freedom of speech. Freedom of worship. Freedom from want. Freedom from fear. The first two freedoms, of speech and religion, are protected by the First Amendment in the United States Constitution. His inclusion of the latter two freedoms went beyond the values protected by the U.S. Bill of Rights. Roosevelt endorsed a broader human right to economic and personal security. These latter two have shaped public policy ever since. Having traveled in several foreign countries, I celebrate the freedoms that we enjoy, freedoms that many do not have. Yet at the same time I cringe when freedom is equated with irresponsibility. Too often we transgress the limitations that freedom imposes, famously said as “Your freedom ends where my nose begins.” Freedom of speech is not freedom to slander. Freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion. Freedom from want is not freedom from work. Freedom from fear is not freedom from duty. Which reminds me of a recent article I read...



[show naval weapons]

His story to a point is honorable but not remarkable. He was an unheralded high school pitcher in North Carolina who happened to be observed throwing a bullpen session by a Naval Academy athletic coordinator. He was given the

opportunity to attend the Naval Academy, where he pitched for the Midshipmen. After graduation he served five years, including two tours as a weapons officer in the Persian Gulf and another doing drug interdiction off the coast of Columbia. Honorable to be sure, but not remarkable. If not promoted as a career officer, one would expect him to return home to private industry. But there's more to the story.



**[show We hold these truths]** Slavery. It was a scourge on our country which cost the lives of 620,000 Americans in the Civil War. Its effects are still felt in the racism experienced in Ferguson, Baltimore, Charlotte. Americans, more than any other country, extol their blood-bought freedom. So we can identify with the Jews who told Jesus "We are offspring of Abraham—we might say Abraham *Lincoln*—and have never been enslaved to anyone." "We hold these truths to be self-evident," the Declaration of Independence says, "that all Men are created equal." That's what we're about. Liberty. Freedom. Equality. Jesus would not argue the point. In fact, he would agree with the equality of all. But on his terms, not ours. And his terms are these.



**[show slave to sin]** *You are born in slavery.* His words: "Everyone who practices sin is a *slave* to sin." We are equally sinful. Equally slaves to sin. The freedom we extol as Americans? Too often it is a cover-up for evil. Too often freedom means 'freedom to do what you want,' 'freedom to indulge any behavior,' 'freedom from rules.' This is not freedom. It is license. License to sin. And it signals just the opposite of freedom. It signals slavery. Slavery to sin. With no capacity to do otherwise. Any public righteousness only masks private corruption. What else can explain that 150 years after the end of the Civil War a white man would join a black Bible study group, only to shoot dead nine innocents? With all due respect to the legislative process, you can't legislate morality. Jesus' first word is: *We are morally corrupt.*



**[show broken chain]** His second word? *You must be reborn by the Spirit.* Again, Jesus' words: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." What word did Jesus bring that sets us free? *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me to proclaim liberty to the captives.* Liberty. That hallmark of the American revolution. "Liberty and justice for all." But only Jesus can give genuine substance to these words. And the substance that he gives is his lifeblood and broken flesh. Not in the halls of Congress nor the field of battle. Rather, upon a cross on a distant hill. Because

the bonds of slavery cannot be broken by legislation nor armament. They can only be broken by a force greater than the sin that forged them. And that force is love. Love that sent God's One and Only. Love that became flesh and dwelt among us. Love that withheld nothing, not even his very life. When this truth takes hold of you, then it sets you free. And, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."



**[show liberty to captives]**

The Lord anointed me to bring good news to the brokenhearted, news of comfort, of favor, of liberty. You have heard that good news today in the pronouncement of forgiveness. Your chains are broken. You are *Slaves to None*. You have been set free. And not just from the curse of sin. Also from the guilt of sin. For we carry a boatload of guilt around with us. Over words we desperately wish we could get back. Over actions for which we are deeply ashamed. Over lost opportunities to help, to share, to say "I love you." And in our guilt we vainly attempt to do better, to be better, to live better. Jesus says "enough." You have been set free. Lay down your burdens and cares, your guilt and vain strivings. It is forgiven. All of it. Let it go. We will speak of it no more. *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*



**[show Navy Harris]**

I failed to tell you the dream of our Navy officer. "I always had a dream of being a professional athlete," he said. In the Navy he blossomed as a pitcher. He started throwing the ball 94 mph and set a school record in his sophomore year at the academy. By his senior year baseball scouts declared him one of the top collegiate pitchers. The Cardinals thought so, too, and drafted him in 2008. However, there was a hitch. He had committed to five years after graduation as a commissioned Naval officer. It was never a problem for... Lt. Mitchell Harris. "This is something I committed to, and it was much bigger than me." So he served his country with distinction, all the while maintaining his pitching onboard ship. When he got out of the Navy in 2013, he called the Cardinals. John Mozeliak honored their offer and put him in their Class A team in State College, Pa. His arm strength returned, he soared through three minor league levels, and this year he got the call to the big leagues as a 29-year-old rookie.



**[show Oak of righteousness]**

As disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ we are slaves to none. At one and the same time we are *Subject to All*. “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution,” says Peter. “Respect everyone. Love your fellow believer. Fear God. Honor the president.” Freed from the baggage of sin, we are free to serve God and one another. “The truth will set you free,” in Jesus’ words. To serve willingly. To love unconditionally. To give generously. To care compassionately. This is genuine freedom. Because in so doing you reveal Jesus, and I can think of no greater honor. In so doing, in the words of Isaiah, you will “be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”



**[show Cardinal Harris]**

The fan, sitting above the visiting bullpen at Progressive Field in Cleveland, was relentless, taunting the St. Louis Cardinals’ rookie reliever. He mocked Mitch Harris. Teased him. Boomed him. Then there was silence. The fan stared at his phone for several minutes. When he spoke again, in was almost in reverence. “Hey Harris,” the fan said. “Uh, I just googled you. Thank you for your service. I’m sorry for getting on you so much.” Says Harris: “It’s the first time anyone has ever apologized to me for booing me.” When Harris was introduced at a recent charity dinner for autism, he was the only player greeted with a standing ovation. When the national anthem is played and the color guard is on the field, no one returns to the dugout until he gets his cue from Harris. “Respect everyone. Love your fellow believer. Fear God. Honor the president.” For Harris, it’s hard to imagine another path. “What I went through, going to the Academy and the Navy, it kind of imprinted who I am. But I want everyone who served to be recognized, too. When I see those guys in an airport or somewhere else, I’ll go out of my way to say ‘Thank you for what you’re doing.’ They should never be taken for granted.”

Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution. This is the will of God, that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. By doing so you show yourselves to be servants of God. By doing so you show yourselves to be free indeed. Amen.