
The Face of Freedom

The Face of Freedom

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Canon George Maxwell
Vicar**

I was sitting in our daily Eucharist service not very long ago, next to one of my friends. The priest leading the service announced that we would use a form different from the one we normally used. I picked up two prayer books, and handed one of them to my friend. He looked at me with a smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye, and said, "Now, George, I don't need a prayer book."

My friend is John Miner and I have been thinking about him a lot this week.

He and his wife, Cecil, have been at the heart of our Fourth of July

gathering at the Cathedral for the Peachtree Road Race. (John is the one dressed in yellow—a subtle signal that, at least on this day, his enthusiasm for God, Country, and Georgia Tech all sprang from the same Spirit.) John won't be able to come to the Cathedral this year, though. The heat and the logistics have become too difficult to negotiate.



I was thinking about how closely I associate John with the idea of freedom.

We'll be talking a lot about freedom this week. It's part of who we are. It's what we are celebrating. After all, this is the "land of the free" and the "cradle of liberty."

It has always been this way. Just look quickly at our history. The Declaration of Independence lauds liberty as an inalienable right. The Constitution claims that its purpose is to secure the blessings of liberty. Abraham Lincoln proclaimed that the Civil War was about "the new birth of freedom." Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared that we would fight World War II in defense of the Four Freedoms. Harry Truman argued that the Cold War was necessary to protect the Free World.

Yet, it's hard to know exactly what we are talking about when we talk about freedom. It rarely means the same thing to different people, and even commonly accepted meanings have a way of changing over time as the circumstances of our lives change. It is, I think, something that we have to live out before we can think about it very intelligently.

That's why Paul is so helpful.

Paul sees freedom as the goal of the spiritual life. He tells the Galatians, for example, that it "is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (5:1)

He has a very specific idea of what freedom means. "But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." (5:13)

And, he gives us a picture of what this freedom of faith looks like. He calls it walking "by the Spirit." (5:16) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." (5:22)

In other words, freedom lived out looks a lot like , well, John Miner.

It looks a lot like the excitement on John's face in Bible Study, when he encourages us "to remember the Holy Spirit!"

It looks a lot like the gratitude on John's face during the Prayers of the People, when he thanks God for Cecil, their three daughters, nine grandchildren, and thirteen great-grandchildren.

It looks a lot like the compassion on John's face at the Information Desk, when he asks for food or MARTA tokens for the homeless guests who come to the Cathedral.

Freedom, when you get right down to it, is not as much about what we are getting away from as it is about who we are moving toward. Real freedom, though, is not something we accomplish. It is something that we are given by God.

In his book, *Faith's Freedom*, Luke Timothy Johnson says it this way, "freedom is given by faith, the human self-disposition that accepts life and worth as a gift from God." (174)

I will miss John Miner at our Fourth of July gathering at the Cathedral.

I won't feel quite as free without the presence of the Spirit that he enables. But, he will be part of our Communion.

I will have the honor of taking the Eucharist to John and Cecil at their home after the race. They will participate with us in the Body of Christ just as they always have. Freedom, after all, is more a continuing process of response than a completed product.

And, yes, I will be taking a prayer book for the service. Not for John, mind you. For me!

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*