

## Swaddling, Freedom, Safety, Flags & More!

My taste in books has changed recently because of my new vocation as a parent. I was reading about the benefits of swaddling your baby in *The Happiest Baby on the Block* (Bantam Books, 2002). The author, Harvey Karp, M.D., asserts that one of the reasons that swaddling fell out of fashion in this country was democracy. He writes, “our founding fathers (and mothers) wanted their children to live in freedom, but this attitude led them to reject swaddling as a form of “baby prison” (p.110).” Karp goes on to make the case that what babies want and need is safety, not freedom. Not only do newborns feel safer when wrapped up snugly in a blanket, but they actually are safer because they are at less risk from injuring themselves with their own flailing arms. Karp goes on to repeat the old adage, “with freedom comes responsibility.” Infants are not able to be responsible for themselves yet, so freedom is beyond their grasp.

So, with Independence Day approaching, I find myself reflecting on that distinction between freedom and safety. Terrorism is not new in the history of the world, yet it is very much on our minds these days. The most pervasive evil of terrorism is that it tempts us to respond out of fear and our desire for safety. Yet, safety is the opposite of freedom. For example, going to war might make us feel safe. Wire-tapping American citizens or illegally detaining foreign nationals might make us feel safe. The sad irony is that safety does not come, but civil liberties and freedom are sometimes eroded.

Take the recent tragedy at Virginia Tech as an example. Every one of us might respond to such an event by carrying a gun from now on. This might make us feel safer. It might

even have saved a couple of the lives that were lost that day. But it would make us less free. We would begin to feel naked without our weapon. We would feel unsafe without it. Soon we would **not** feel free to **not** carry our gun. It’s quite a paradox – we have the freedom to carry a gun, but if safety is our motivation we actually lose freedom in the process.

Another example of this irony is whether or not to have an American flag in the worship space of a church. Our flag is a wonderful symbol of our freedoms as Americans; freedoms that were hard fought and that we too often take for granted. One of the freedoms that our flag represents is the freedom of religion. Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others can worship God freely without fear of persecution (at least in theory – persecution still exists, unfortunately, even in America). They are free to display the American flag, if they like (though it should be displayed properly, not ignored or left in the rain or outside at night). And in a delicious irony, that same flag represents their freedom to **not** display the flag. This is what it means to have a separation between church and state. There is no state religion. We do not live in the Holy Roman Empire, nor do we live in Nazi Germany. The sanctuary is a sanctuary *from* the state as well as a sanctuary *for* its citizens.

You may have noticed that our flags have recently been put back on display in our worship space. They were taken to the cleaners after the smoke damage in our building two and a half years ago. Sadly, very few people even missed them. I’ve been wondering how long it would take for us to finish cleaning up from that smoke damage, and this brings us closer to being finished. Thank you to those who took the initiative.

As I’ve already said above, we have the freedom to display those flags. However, if anyone were ever to take

away our freedom by daring to tell us that we had to display the flag, we would very publicly remove them! We would not allow ourselves to be swaddled in someone else's nationalism.

This is an example of the wonderful freedom and responsibility that we have as Americans. Just think then about the even greater freedom and responsibility that God has given us as Christians! Why, not even the Sabbath itself is sacred if we allow it to take away our freedom in Christ! Jesus himself is quoted in Mark 2:27, "The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath."

And in Galatians 5:13 Paul writes, "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another."

We have been freed from sin and given the responsibility to love and serve others as agents of God's work in the world! It is risky and decidedly not safe, but it is the freedom of the Gospel. So, this Independence Day my prayer is that we will spend less time swaddling ourselves in safety like babies and instead be encouraged to grow up into the freedoms that we have as Americans and especially as Christians. Thanks be to God for all these freedoms.

Peace be with you,  
Pastor Chris