

## LET FREEDOM RING

Philemon 1:8-16  
Exodus 3:1-12

Faith Community  
July 4, 2004

### Introduction

On Wednesday of this past week, Saddam Hussein was brought before a judge in Iraq to be read his rights as a prisoner. Those rights include the right to a trial, an attorney, and the ability to defend himself against charges made against him.

In June of 2002, a man in a different country made his way through an international airport was suddenly detained and hauled away to jail. He did not receive a hearing, he has not been allowed to see an attorney, he has never been charged with any offense, there has been no trial, and he has not appeared before a judge to be read his rights.

Since 2002, Jose Padilla has been held in solitary confinement without any charges brought against him.

### I

God cares about freedom and human rights. In fact, God is the author of freedom because God was the first to extend freedom to anyone. We see God's concern for freedom all through the Bible.

Our Old Testament reading demonstrates God's concern for the Jews who were held in slavery in Egypt. Because God saw the inhumanity with which they were treated and their total lack of freedom, God called Moses to lead them out of that slavery and into freedom.

Because God was so concerned about their lack of freedom and the way in which they were treated, he planned to set them free. So God called Moses to lead his people on the long journey from tyranny to freedom. God led the freedom march from Egypt to the Promised Land. God is concerned about people's freedom.

### II

In the New Testament, Paul writes to a slaveholder named Philemon to encourage him to release his slave, Onesimus. Paul wants Onesimus to be free and he wants him to work side by side with him. This is what the entire book of Philemon is about. Paul says he is asking Philemon to release his slave, but really, he says, he has the right to demand it from him. Do you remember Paul's words? "Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love."

For Paul freedom is important and the life of this man is valuable, even though he is a slave and considered part of Philemon's property. Paul pleads with Philemon to do the right thing which is to give this man his freedom.

### III

More important than these examples, and standing behind both of them is the freedom which comes from God. God values freedom so much that God creates each one of us as free people. God is not a dictator. God is not a tyrant who demands that we do things his way. Even though God could exert total power over us, God doesn't; God gives us freedom.

God could have created us to be fully obedient to him. We would have to believe in him, we would have to obey what God told us to do. We would have to do what is right. But we would also be like robots, following demands without thinking, believing without faith, doing right without intention. We would react because we had to, not because we chose to.

God cares enough about freedom to make us free.

And it is real freedom. We can disobey God, we can defy God, and we can even refuse to believe that God exists. Freedom is so important to God that he offers it to us even though there is a high price to pay.

Often when we disobey God, we hurt others and ourselves. So when a man with a gun opens fire in a huge crowd, God doesn't freeze his hand or magically deflect those bullets, because people are free – even to do obscenely horrible acts.

### IV

As God's people, freedom is important to us. Since God has given us freedom, we seek freedom for other people. As God has limited himself so that we can freely choose, so we limit ourselves to provide freedom to other people. God gave us the freedom to believe or deny God, therefore it is important that we give people the same freedom – to believe or deny there is a God.

Because God has given us freedom, it is important that we give others freedom – of speech, of the press, of religion. God does not force us to believe in him, so how can we force others to follow our God?

### Conclusion

In the beginning, we spoke of Saddam Hussein's appearance to be read his rights in Iraq. We also spoke of Jose Padilla, a man nabbed at an airport and held without being charged with any offense. Padilla has been in solitary confinement for two years now without appearing in court to be read his rights, without access to an attorney, and without being able to speak in his own defense.

He was picked up at O' Hare Airport in Chicago and has been held in solitary confinement by the United States Government in a United States Navy brig.

Amen.