

On January 1, 1863,

President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation, declaring that

“all persons held as slaves within any State

or designated part of a State,

the people whereof shall then be in rebellion

against the United States,

shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”¹

Some celebrated, some decried, others denied,

and many, oh so many, *did not get* the memo.

Indeed, two years, six months, and eighteen days later,

on June 19, 1865, what we now commemorate as *Juneteenth*,

enslaved African Americans in Galveston, Texas,

were *finally* informed of their freedom. *Because deliverance takes time.*



For these African Americans, the cessation of enslavement

was but the belated recognition of their humanity and dignity,

was but the sluggish affirmation of this deeper truth:

freedom is not a privilege

granted by princes or potentates, administrations or regimes;

freedom is a right bestowed by God.

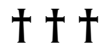
And yet, that long-ago day marked not a fulfillment,

but a beginning – the beginning of the long struggle

¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Emancipation Proclamation” (January 1, 1863), National Archives, accessed June 19, 2026, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/emancipation-proclamation>.

for full access to human dignity for African Americans

and freedom for us all. Because deliverance takes time.



Considering that deliverance takes time,

always we must remember the words of and surrender to Jesus.

Jesus, the rabble-rouser and revolutionary, who does not mince words.

Jesus who, in this morning's Gospel,

is at his most confrontational and controversial,

because, as Paul teaches in this morning's passage from Romans,

Jesus did not come to make bad people good, but to make dead people live.

Jesus, who, channeling the prophetic urgency of Jeremiah,

that erstwhile prophet for whom the Word of God

was like a burning fire shut up in his bones,

said then, and still says to us now,

the time has come for you – for you and me – to be made free.



Beloved, the truth is, 161 years after the first Juneteenth,

we are still in need of liberation. *Because deliverance takes time.*

The truth is that just as the people of the southern kingdom of Judah

to whom Jeremiah prophesied lived between nostalgia and fear,

looking back to a golden age under David and Solomon,

while facing the rising threat of Babylon,

we are also caught between these two phenomena.

Like them, we live between nostalgia and fear.



Now, it must be said:

nostalgia and fear are profound, human phenomena.

How human it is to long for the good old days

amid increasing disorientation and complexity,

uncertainty and upheaval!

Yet nostalgia can be a dangerous thing,

especially when it mutates into denial,

especially when this denial fuels a hope

for the return to an America that never really existed

for all its citizens.

Sometimes, nostalgia is the last refuge of those who fear the future.

But not only that.



It is all too human to fear, to be afraid.

While fear is often viewed negatively,

fear is primarily an essential survival mechanism.

At its core, fear triggers rapid cognitive and physiological responses

that keep us safe from danger, sharpen our focus,

motivate us to prepare for challenges,

and even provide a natural, euphoric rush.

Yet unacknowledged, unchecked, unmanaged, and unprocessed,

fear can adversely color our whole outlook on life and the world.

History books, our life experiences, and our own eyes reveal

how fear of death, fear of pain, fear of loss, fear of rejection,
fear of the other, fear of difference, fear of conflict,
fear of abandonment, fear of change, fear of replacement,
fear of retribution, fear of the future,
and so many other fears,
when these fears assume their ultimate forms,
can cause breaks with reality, withdrawal from the world,
and much, much worse.



And so, if we want deliverance, if we desire freedom,

we must remember the words of Jesus and surrender.

Standing squarely between the mess of nostalgia and fear,

in the fifteen verses of our Gospel this morning,

Jesus asks us not to be afraid three times.

How easy it would be for me to declare to you

that Jesus is telling us, telling you and me, to live without fear!

Well, I do not think that is the case.

It seems to me that Jesus is asking us, rather,

to choose faith over fear.

It seems to me that Jesus is asking us, asking this community,

not to let fear govern or drive us,

not to let fear hold us captive or immobilize us.

That Jesus is asking us not to let our fear of opposition or conflict
coax us into appalling silence in the face of injustice.

That Jesus is asking us not to let our fear of death
keep us from really living, keep us from showing up,
keep us from really caring about what happens to others.

That Jesus is asking us not to let fears
of our own insignificance or worthlessness
blind us to God's unconditional love for us and all people.



Beloved, when Jesus says, "Be not afraid,"
he is asking us, asking this community, to let faith govern our fear.
So that we take the words of that Roman Catholic hymn to heart:

*If you pass through raging waters in the sea,
you shall not drown.*

*If you walk amid the burning flames,
you shall not be harmed.*

*If you stand before the pow'r of hell
and death is at your side,
know that I am with you through it all.*

Be not afraid.

I go before you always.

Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.²



² Bob Dufford, SJ, "Be Not Afraid" (Portland, OR: Oregon Catholic Press, 1975).

Be not afraid.

I go before you always.

Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.

Not rest that comes from a peaceful slumber, not even eternal rest.

Rest that renews our efforts to redeem, not revise,
our complicated history.

Rest that inspires us to destigmatize fear and to face it.

Rest that impels us to choose faith over fear.

Rest that readies us to show up for one another.

Rest that strengthens us to love.

Rest that braces us to lift high the cross.

Rest that fortifies our patience, courage, and perseverance.

Rest that reminds us that Jesus is with us through it all
and that God's grace is sufficient.

Rest that buoys our joy
or simply gives us needed grace to face one more day.

Rest that revives us to chase after the freedom
for which we have been made.



161 years after the first Juneteenth,
still we must wrestle with the question that loomed large
before those formerly enslaved African Americans.

What will we make of our freedom?

Now more than ever we must look to Jesus,

that rabble-rousing revolutionary

who ever reminds us . . .

The freedom that he brings

is not freedom from adversity or conflict or fear,

but freedom in the face of adversity, conflict, and fear;

not freedom to ruin, but to restore;

not freedom to hate, but to help;

not freedom to worry, but to worship;

not freedom to panic, but to praise;

not freedom to exclude, but to embrace;

not freedom to loathe, but to love.

This, yes this, is the freedom for which Jesus makes us free.

This freedom will deliver us

as work to ensure that today is better than tomorrow

and tomorrow is better than today.

Amen.