

“Freed To”

June 30, 2019

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Galatians 5: 1,13-25

Paul has just spent the last 3 chapters helping his readers understand that Christ has set us free. We are free. Jesus has overcome this physical world, so we are free from having to obey the longings and desires of our physical bodies and this world. We are invited to join Him in His resurrection. We have new life within us and do not need to submit to the old life anymore. We are freed from its sinful clutches. Since Jesus' sacrifice on the cross has freed us from enslavement to our old sinful lives, we are also free from the old religious law that helped call us away from sin's clutches. Paul says that law is like a parent that defines what you can and cannot do as well as when and how do to it. That is part of a parent's job until you are old enough and wise enough to figure it out for yourself. Now that you know Jesus Christ, you know the fullness of God and you are freed from the law as caretaker. You can't say it much plainer than v. 1 of our reading, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Christ has set us free from the sin that ruled us and Christ set us free from old understandings of righteousness that were based on what and how you did things as opposed to being based in faith in Jesus Christ. To go back to either of those would be to "submit again to a yoke of slavery." We have been freed from that yoke. We are a free people and will never give up our freedom.

A number of years ago one of our Little Lambs workers was telling me a story of her Thanksgiving weekend with her then 7-year-old son. As they were getting ready to go to have Thanksgiving dinner with the extended family, her son kept dragging his feet and whining and being a major pest. When she finally sat down and asked him what was going on, he said he didn't want to go. He said whenever everyone gets together at grandma's house, they all treat him like a baby. They comment on how much he has grown. They tell the same story about the terrible face he made before spitting out the cranberry sauce when he was two. They pinch his cheeks and comment on how much he looks like his dad. He was seven now and too old for that kind of stuff. Trying to be sensitive and encouraging, she told him he would be going to Thanksgiving dinner as a big kid this year. That meant this year he would have control of his plate. He would carry it himself and load it himself, free from mom telling him exactly what to do. He was free to choose the food he liked and pass on the food he didn't. He would no longer be a baby with mom telling him what he could eat and not eat. He was a big boy. With a new sense of confidence and excitement, he got ready to go to grandma's house. When it came time to eat, he took his plate, went through the line and filled it with mashed potatoes, jello, two brownies and a cookie. When he got back to the table, mom immediately sent him back up to get some meat and a vegetable. "But mom," he exclaimed, "you said I was free to choose what I wanted to eat!" "Having the freedom to choose means you are free to make good choices," Mom responded. "Now go back up there and make good choices."

We are quickly approaching the 4th of July when we as a nation celebrate Independence Day, the day we proclaimed our freedom from English rule, taxation without representation, having to house soldiers in our homes, and obedience to the crown. We do not forget the sacrifices paid for our freedom and we are thankful for all the evils we have been freed from, but if we stop there, we are like a 7-year-old with a plate of mashed potatoes, jello, two brownies and a cookie.

The Bible has a much more significant understanding of freedom. From a Biblical perspective, freedom is a two preposition proposition. It is not just about what we are freed from, but what we are freed to. In the Exodus story, God freed Israel from being slaves in Egypt where they carried the burden of Pharaoh's building projects; and the first thing they did once they were clear of Pharaoh's army was go to the mountain of God and pledge their allegiance to God. They were freed **from** being Pharaoh's slaves **to** being God's people. They pledged their obedience and undying gratitude to God. Through Jesus Christ, we are freed from being enslaved to our body along with its desires and its death, but it doesn't end there. We are freed **from** our body **to** our spirit. Through Jesus Christ we are freed **from** obedience to a stagnant law that doesn't change and pretends all people are the same **to** a living relationship with God – freed **to** a life defined by love for neighbor and self. Verses 13-14 "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

The temptation to only claim half of freedom's two preposition proposition didn't start with a 7-year-old boy at his family's thanksgiving dinner. Galatians gives us fair warning of what happens when we only claim what we are freed from and not to. If we just claim freedom **from** the Old Testament caretaker known as the law and fail to claim the servitude of being freed **to** serve one another out of love of Christ, then we cannot help but become enslaved to the flesh and our petty, bodily dictates. Starting in verse 19, "Now the works of the flesh are plain: sexual immorality, impurity... worshipping things that are less than God like money or acceptance or the need to feel better than someone else... jealousy, anger, selfishness, divisiveness... envy, drunkenness... and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." Short translation: if you live in obedience to your body and its urges, following whatever it tells you it wants, then you follow your body right to the grave, and that is it. You lie with your allegiance. But if you claim your freedom **from** the body and the law, and give it **to** the Spirit of God, then "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" and eternal life. When we are freed from serving our own frail egos to serving the almighty God, we are truly free. Freed from having to exact revenge on those who have done us wrong because they don't control us. God does. Freed from responding in anger because God has got this. Freed from having to devour one another because the outcome is not up to us – God has already made a way through Jesus Christ.

While I am gone, remember, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery... but through love be servants of one another." Love and

take care of each other as Christ has loved and taken care of you, and I'll be back before you know it.

Mike Van Heyningen