

5th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, June 27, 2010

SECOND READING: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

For Paul, the freedom Christ gives is not permission to do whatever we want. It is the invitation to be what we could not be otherwise. The power and guidance of Christ's Holy Spirit produce a different kind of life, one marked by the fruit of this Holy Spirit.

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

13For 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. 14For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

16Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. 18But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

22By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε.

13 ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοί, μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί, ἀλλὰ διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις. 14 ὁ γὰρ πᾶς νόμος ἐν ἐνὶ λόγῳ πεπλήρωται ἐν τῷ ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. 15 εἰ δὲ ἀλλήλους δάκνετε καὶ κατεσθίετε, βλέπετε μὴ ὑπ' ἀλλήλων ἀναλωθῆτε.

16 Λέγω δὲ πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκὸς οὐ μὴ τελέσητε. 17 ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σάρκος, ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται, ἵνα μὴ ἂ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε. 18 εἰ δὲ πνεύματι ἄγεσθε, οὐκ ἔστε ὑπὸ νόμον. 19 φανερὰ δὲ ἔστιν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἅτινα ἔστιν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία ἀσέλγεια, 20 εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία, ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος θυμοί, ἐριθειᾶι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, 21 φθόνοι, μέθαι, κῶμοι καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις, ἃ προλέγω ὑμῖν, καθὼς προεῖπον ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν.

22 ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματος ἔστιν ἀγάπη χαρὰ εἰρήνη, μακροθυμία χρηστότης ἀγαθωσύνη, πίστις 23 πραύτης ἐγκράτεια· κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος. 24 οἱ δὲ

τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις. 25
Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματι, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν.

The New Lifestyle

+ *In nomine Domini. Amen.*

For the nearly 2,000 years before Jesus was born, a diverse group of tribal societies were spread across Europe ... from the western shores of what we know as the British Isles, southward to the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal), through most of Central Europe, what Julius Caesar in his conquests called Gaul. These people were the ancient Celts.

Around 300 years before Jesus was born, a group that inhabited in the area that we know as eastern France, Switzerland, Austria, and southwest Germany ... began what is known in history as the Gallic Invasion of the Balkans, including a movement into Greece, ancient Thrace (modern Bulgaria) and a group that crossed over the Bosphorus Strait into modern Turkey and settled into the highlands of Turkey. The colony these Gauls settled became known by their name, Galatia.

It was to Galatia that Saul of Tarsus, we know him as Paul of the movement of those who followed Jesus ... it was to Galatia that Paul traveled in what is called his Second Missionary Journey ... a travel that set out from Jerusalem, went north through what is now Lebanon and Syria, into Turkey, across the Aegean Sea into Macedonia, down along the eastern coast of Greece, across to the Peloponnese and into Corinth, back across the Aegean into Turkey again, southward along the western shore of that country, into Rhodes, and from there by ship across the Mediterranean landing back in Israel at Caesarea. All this took place about half-way through the 1st Century, about 10 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth at the hands of the Roman occupiers of this whole area that I have described.

Along the journey, Paul told his story of Jesus, and around that story gathered people who wanted to follow Jesus. These people formed themselves into congregations (gatherings where the story of Jesus was told and taught), and where newcomers were brought into the congregation by being Baptized, and where the congregation found strength around the Supper which Jesus had left his followers, the Supper we call the Eucharist, or Holy Communion.

The congregations in Galatia were some of those started by Paul, and to whom he writes sometime between 40 – 50 CE.

Some biblical scholars believe that it was written very soon after Paul's second visit to Galatia, during this Second Missionary Journey, while he was in the city of Corinth. Others think it was written after the Council of Jerusalem (that meeting which Paul describes in his letter to the Galatians as a private consultation between Peter and himself; but which the Acts of the Apostles ((written some 30 years after the time of Paul)) describes as a giant *Churchwide Assembly* ... in any case, it was that meeting or that *Council* which decided that converts to Christianity did not have to keep most of the Mosaic Law, including the Jewish ritual of circumcision for the boys and men.

In any case, Paul in the writing of this letter needs to persuade the congregations in Galatia that those who are teaching them that they could not possibly become followers of Jesus without adhering to the rituals Jesus himself knew (circumcision, rules about which foods to eat, and which not to eat, and the like) ... Paul takes on these accusers in what is often called his “Gospel” ... the Letter to the Galatians, his Epistle of Freedom (as in the first verse of the 5th Chapter which you heard read to you this morning) **Τῆ ἔλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν**¹. “For freedom, Christ has set you free.”

Followers of Jesus, Paul insists, are not only free *from* certain things (and he will list them later on) but incredibly free *for* a new lifestyle ... based not upon adhering to rules and regulations, but adhering to love — Paul repeats it again, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” — and certainly not using freedom to love (and what a wonderful way he puts it) as something to *eat up one another!*

Paul is attacking the Biblical Fundamentalists of his time; the people who would turn any commandment to love into a hammer of judgment, who demanded that in order to be a *fundamentalist* follower of Jesus, you had to be a *fundamentalist* Jew first.

Because it’s possible to enter into a relationship with God and then abandon God’s priorities and follow after one’s selfish desires at the expense of others ... we see that all the time ... *good Christians* who condemn homosexuality, *good Christians* who would attack, even to the point of harm, immigrants, *good Christians* who think nothing of using up resources at the expense of those who have no access to resources, *good Christians* who meet in the assembly, pray with fervor and then cannot see the child in need just outside the doorstep of the gathering.

No, says, Paul ... when that happens, you have missed the whole point of being a follower ... you have turned to the “dark side” you have become a Person-of-Fear-and-Nastiness² ... you no longer hear Christ inside yourself.

Freedom, Paul reminds the Galatian congregations, is freedom simply to walk in the steps of Jesus, to die with him, to be raised to newness of life with him, and to live out that life in abundant graceful incredibly beautiful goodness.

And that goodness, says Paul, cannot be legislated, it cannot be demanded, it cannot be regulated. It simply comes from the new lifestyle ... or, better yet, what is good on the inside, comes to the outside ... know that God loves you, so love yourself, and by all means love your neighbor ... put into practice the gifts of that Spirit of Love ...

Three stories:

First. What a wonderful experience it was yesterday to have our congregation walk in the Santa Fe PRIDE Parade again this year! Hundreds and hundreds of people joined together, walking in solidarity, to celebrate and affirm each other as human beings, as children of God ... the outpouring of acceptance and love which is inside to the outside.

¹ I include the Greek here, because it is a bit idiomatic. You could translate it more loosely ... something like “Freedom ... you ... Christ ... free!” and that would get the gist of the meaning of this sentence.

² What I have called POFAN.

(I loved the ringing in my ears of the little bells attached to the Festival Banners which were carried behind me as I held the one end of our Christ Lutheran Church Banner at the front of our group! And the brightly decorated Christ Lutheran Church Jeep! And the folks from our congregation walking in step with so many others ...

And then the group of angry hateful loudspeaker speaking vicious people standing on the sidewalk as we went by ... damning us to Hell, condemning us in the worst kind of language, obscene, vulgar, inappropriate ... using words I cannot use in Church ... Fundamental "Believers" whose Gospel is certainly not that of love. I wondered whether they have ever read the Epistle to the Galatians, or just parts of it ... the parts pertaining to their own prejudice ...

And the response of those in the Parade? Many sang "Jesus loves *you* this we know, for the Bible tells *us* so!"

Evil anger and hate on the inside coming to the outside ... met with goodness on the inside exploding to the outside.

Second. Three congregations were represented at Temple Beth Shalom for Shabbat Service Friday evening (ourselves, St. Bede's, and of course Temple Beth Shalom), where not only did Bishop Gene Robinson speak ... he was brought forward by Rabbi Schwab and blessed at the open Ark, in front of the Torah, in the presence of the Holy One.

The love and goodness inside, coming outside.

Third. We have to thank Beth Stephens for all her work alongside the other two Directors of this year's Rainbow Trail Day Camp held cooperatively with Westminster Presbyterian Church and St. Bede's Church and Christ Lutheran Church ... hosting this year by St. Bede's. With her fervent work the love that we find at the foot of the Cross, the love that we know in the presence of God, the love that we teach in the person of Jesus ... that love reached the children and parents and volunteers and everyone involved with the Camp this year. What a privilege! What a demonstration of love on the inside coming fully to the outside!

It is all the Gospel of Paul ... freedom to lead a new lifestyle where who we are as children of God is acknowledged, celebrated, and shared ... so that the love of God may come fully and richly upon everyone we meet ... everyone we meet.

May it be so always in our community.

Deo Gratias (+)
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