

No One Who Puts His/Her Hand on the Plow

The freedom to do God's thing

Text: 2 Kings2: 1-2, 6-14

Galatians 5:1,13-25 (Series C, 3rd Sunday after Pentecost) Ps.77:1-2,11-20

Luke 9:51-62

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love. ... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Let us pray:

A middle-aged woman joined my pastor's class many years ago. She said that she had a religious up-bringing back in her youth but wanted to *"get in touch with God again"*. During the first session she shared passionately with us that she had a very strict upbringing, and in her younger days had attended one of those churches that had a rule for everything, usually a rule *against* everything.

She said, "We had rules against dancing, against playing cards, against mowing grass on Sundays. We had a rule about how often we should attend church and Bible classes. There were rules about what was good entertainment and what was not. And the members of the church made sure those rules were kept.

When I was in my 20s she continued, I once went to a pub with a couple of friends. We didn't do anything wrong – had a couple of drinks, played pool, had a good time. Someone from the church saw me and reported me to one of the elders. I was asked to please explain and ordered never to go near that place or those people again."

As she continued the pastor's classes her negative attitude about the church changed. She found that Christianity wasn't a set of rules about what to do and what not to do. She heard that through Jesus we have a wonderful new freedom.

With a great deal of enthusiasm she wrote down a text from the Bible in her notebook so that she could refer to it again in the future. The class had just been discussing Paul's words in Galatians 5:1: *"Freedom is what we have—Christ has set us free!"*

Christ is the one who sets us free from the endless treadmill of "do this" and "don't do that". Paul is telling his readers that true Christianity is not following a set of rules and striving to the impossible – trying to live a life that is holy and perfect and acceptable to God.

Religion that emphasises rules is a frustrating religion – because we can never keep the rules or live up to their expectations. Our relationship with God is not a matter of what we do or how well we think we are living the Christian life.

Jesus is the one and only way to a restored relationship with God. Didn't Jesus say, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me*" (John 14:6). Jesus has done it all for us through his death and resurrection. He gave his life for us so that we can have freedom from the burden of our sin and the freedom from the punishment we deserve.

We are free from anxious religious striving, free from endless effort to be religious; free from the never-ending striving to keep in God's good books. In Jesus, we have been made right with God. Yes it is true. Paul says it in his usual concise way, "*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free*" (Galatians 5:13).

Back to the woman in my pastor's class. Everything was going along fine until she said, "The thing I like about this church is that you are free to *believe anything* you want and *your behaviour* is your own business and nobody else's. No one tells you what to do."

Is *that* the freedom for which Christ has set us free? Does our Christian freedom mean the freedom to *think, act, and be anything we like*? Listen to Paul as he continues what he has to say to the Galatians about freedom: "*...do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self indulgence, but through love become slaves of one another.*"

Become slaves of one another. The words "freedom" and "slaves" are opposites. A slave is not a free person. How is it possible for Paul, in the same breath, to use the words "*for freedom Christ has set us free*" and also "*become*

slaves of one another"? How is that possible to believe that freedom means to become a slave?

Most of our ideas about freedom relate to the Greek notion that the truly free people are those who enjoy a comfortable life free the worry of making ends meet. The truly free people have the money and the time to be able to do whatever they like - travel overseas,

- live in big houses and lavishly entertain friends,
- spend more time on the golf course,
- drive the best cars,
- wear the best clothes,
- have six dogs.

Because they have the wealth they are free to do anything they like. Money troubles are the last thing they have to worry about. If that were the case? We all know just how flimsy this kind of freedom really is.

Here today and gone tomorrow. And we know that wealth can easily lead to another kind of slavery - a slavery to wanting this year's "new and improved" model, the latest fashions. The saying is true, "The more we have, the more we want." We are never satisfied. Is that freedom? There are several well to do celebrates in society who are in captivity in form or another.

When the Bible speaks about freedom in Christ there is nothing about

- being free of responsibility,
- or being free to do as we please,
- or being free to use other people for our own selfish needs,
- or being free and unrestrained when it comes drugs, alcohol, robbery to support a habit and so on.

The Bible teaches that true freedom is a gift from God. Didn't Jesus say, "*If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free ... if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed*"

(John 8:31-36)? The kind of freedom the Bible talks about, is the kind freedom that comes from our Lord Jesus Christ. We are made right with God.

We are free from our sin and its consequences. Freedom is a gift of God, it is given as a result of being enslaved to the right thing, namely to the Son of God. This is not the kind of freedom that says you can do whatever you like. It's clear this is the reason why Paul is writing to the Galatians.

They were abusing their freedom by the way they were treating one another. We don't know precisely what troubles there were in the *Galatian* congregation but Paul says to his readers: *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve [be slaves to] one another in love.*

And then he proceeds to list the "**fruits of the Spirit**" (5:32f) - **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, self-control**. It's interesting to note that all these relate to living together, they are virtues that promote healthy and happy relationships between people. In Christ, we are free. Free to be "slaves" (**service to one another**) of one another.

Here is a story from the prairies, there was a farmer who lived in a modest country home with his wife. Their children are grown up and have left home. For many years he and his wife cared for his eighty year old mother who has Alzheimer's disease, was blind, and no longer had bowel control.

Their entire lives had to be adjusted to care for his mother. These two often came up in conversation. Some people admired them for their love and patience, others said they were foolish – haven't they heard about nursing homes. Why did they do this?

They answered: "It's a privilege for me to give back some of the care which my mother gave me earlier in my life.

Fortunately I am blessed with a job which has some flexibility, a loving and understanding wife, who by the way does a marvelous job caring for mum's personal needs. I feel blessed that I am able to do this for her."

I think that sort of *slavery (if I may call it so)* is the kind of "slavery" St. Paul is speaking about this morning to us. I am aware, not all people can make the same response or sacrifice to an ailing parent as that farmer and his wife. Yet, I feel there are many other times when we can show the fruits of the Spirit and adjust our lives to the needs of others.

In other words, we become their slaves as we seek to find ways to help and support them in their particular time of need. And remember, as slaves we won't want to leave one stone unturned in trying to fulfill our duty of showing love to those who need our love. And as slaves we don't do these things for reward or praise or demand thanks.

There is plenty of room for celebration on our part when we come across someone who demonstrates the "fruits of the Spirit" and goes out of his/her way to meet the needs of others. For instance, we're free in this church to say anything we want in a meeting, after all, "It's a free country!"

Yet I know people who sometimes don't say whatever they think in a meeting, restricting their speech out of concern for the feelings or limitations of someone else at the meeting. Whether we talk of the way we use our leisure time or the use of our money or the way we use our God-given abilities in the service of others, people who yoke their lives to the lives of others are those who are truly free - free in Christ.

No one who puts his/her hand on the plow and turns back is fit for the kingdom of God, Jesus said. The price of eternal freedom is tax free soul transformation, merely a commitment to be the hands, the feet, the voice, the smile, the love of Christ on earth. In asking for the help to find our path of life all we need to do is *Follow* and live life expecting and hoping for divine interruptions

Martin Luther summarises Paul's thoughts when he said:

***A Christian is the most- free lord of all, and subject to none;
a Christian is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.***

Amen.

June 25, 2022

Prayer concerns: *Matilda Molyneaux-Piper, Shirley Walker, Hanne Bourgeoise, Sven Berg, Astrid Hylland, Ellen Eriksen, Ellen Dahal-Lanteigne, Wilhelmina Tiemersma,, Soo Young, Shirley Walker, Pastor Timothy, Sherly Beller-Kenner, Our prayers are with Nancy and Joyce Hinkson, Nadia Fredericks for the passing of their mothers. May they find solace in the love and grace of God. The dire tension between Russia and Ukraine, Protectors at various places in Canada, Covid -19 patients, essential and Frontline workers, finally Families of departed souls in recent weeks and months.*

Prayer Living, Loving God, by Your Eternal Presence rouse us from complacency and self-indulgence to recognize the mantle of Christ already laid upon our shoulders. Open us to wholly accept and live by the Fruit of the Spirit, looking only forward to the fullness of Your Kingdom through all we do on this Earth. We ask through Jesus, our Redeemer Christ; and the Holy Spirit, our Guide in Truth; who together with You are One God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Make melodies in your heart with these hymns:

- **Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing # 807**
- **I Want to walk as a Child of the Light # 815**
- **Be Thou My Vision # 793**

HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Leonie McFarlane, Ellen Eriksen, & Lynn Richard Studham

WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

n/a