

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 4, 2010

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 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. (NIV)

Freedom. It is something worth fighting for, isn't it? Freedom. It is a wonderful, glorious thing. Think of the many freedoms we enjoy just because we live in this country we call the United States of America. What freedoms mean the most to you? There is a picture that I hope reminds us of one of the great freedoms we have in America. (see screen) I can't imagine being a country where I didn't have the freedom to open my Bible and read. Think of what life would be like in a country where you could be imprisoned or killed for telling another person about Jesus. How sad it would be to not be able to gather in a church like this to worship with fellow believers! Freedom.

Today, I want us to celebrate the freedoms we enjoy. Yes, celebrate our independence on this fourth of July and thank God for our country and the many blessings we enjoy in it. Yet, today I want us to celebrate and focus on an even greater freedom. You see freedom from political tyranny is far surpassed by another freedom we enjoy - freedom from spiritual tyranny. We have blessings that go way above and beyond having taxation with representation. We have freedom from a guilty conscience. We are free to live for God. May we enjoy these wonderful freedoms given to us in Christ Jesus. It is my prayer as we turn again to God's Word that each one of you: **Stand Firm in Your Freedom. You have been freed from sin. You have been freed for service.**

Paul writes of our spiritual freedom: "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*" Christ has freed us from sin. Listen to that beautiful truth again: Christ has set you free from sin. You are free from sin's power. You are free from sin's eternal consequences. You are declared completely not guilty. Jesus has set you free. That's

the good news of the gospel. Yet, there are many who would rob us of our freedom. There are many that want to make us slaves to sin once again. The devil is leading the charge and many false teachers gladly come to his aide. So right from the start Paul reminds us the importance of continued vigilance when it come to our freedom. He tells us to stand firm. He wants us to hold our ground when it comes to the freedom Jesus has given to us. He commands us not to let ourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery.

In the verses omitted in our text and for the last two chapters Paul had been explaining how some were becoming slaves once again. They were losing their precious freedom in Christ. Why? Because people were telling them Jesus' work of redemption is not enough to free us from sin. There were teachers telling the people in the churches in Galatia that more than faith in Christ Jesus was necessary to be saved. They said that Jesus plus works of the law equaled salvation. They said what Jesus did on the cross was all nice and good but that certain Old Testament regulations and ceremonies were also needed. In order to receive forgiveness and heaven they added things like: "*You must...and it is also necessary.*"

Do we ever hear the same thing? Do we ever buy into that thinking that forgiveness is ours because of something we have done or must do? "*You must choose. You must obey. Salvation will be yours if only you comply with this or that.*" Teaching that Jesus is not enough, that works on our part are still necessary to be saved, is still very much alive today. We are just as much in danger. That's why Galatians is a good letter to keep as a part of our regular reading. In this letter, Paul makes it crystal clear that all such teachings rob us of our glorious freedom. Any teaching that combines works, even one work, to what Jesus has done to set us free from sin makes us slaves again. Paul says Jesus plus works on our part is really no gospel at all. Paul explains if forgiveness and salvation could be achieved by us, even a small part of it, then Christ died for nothing, and Jesus is of no value to us at all. For anyone who wants to be saved by the law must keep all of it all of the time and without fail or they are under a curse. They are again slaves to the law and therefore slaves to sin.

So the question Paul asks the people in Galatia and us is: are you willing to give up that freedom? I pray our answer is: absolutely not! Why would we want to go back to being under the curse of the law when Christ has already redeemed from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us when He was hung on the tree? Why would we want to place the burden of God's law onto our backs again when Jesus already fulfilled the law perfectly in our place? Why would we even attempt to atone for sin, when we know Jesus already paid it all as the atoning sacrifice for us? Why would we seek to find life with God in ourselves when God has already given us His Spirit who gives us full life through Jesus' cross and empty grave? Jesus has done it all. You have been freed from sin. Completely. Eternally. Stand firm in your freedom.

But now some were opposed to such freedom and teaching of grace because they said that if forgiveness is free, if Jesus did it all for us, then people will just go out and sin as much as they want without any consequences. They called it cheap grace and thought God would be letting people off the hook. But that is far from what grace and God's love and forgiveness for us in Jesus is all about. That is not our glorious freedom. Jesus has not freed us to sin but from sin. We are not to attempt to sin our way into heaven.

Listen carefully to what Paul has to say on this matter. ***“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature ; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 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.”***

Our old sinful self wants to indulge it’s desires and appetites. It is totally selfish and self serving. We need no help to do what it says and, as Paul says, it’s acts are obvious. Paul lists a whole bunch of sins and adds ***“and the like”*** for the list could go on and on. Those who live to indulge this sinful flesh, those who continue in this pattern of self serving, are in great danger of losing their freedom in Christ and in fact will not inherit eternal life. But that is not what our freedom in Christ is all about.

For those who live by faith in Jesus have another law at work in them - a new man. Each Christian is really a battlefield in and of themselves. There is a constant war raging inside each one of us because Christ has set us free. Now we look to God’s laws not because we are obligated to keep them, but because we want to keep them. We delight in them because of our Savior. Notice how faith works. It is not something like the acts of the sinful nature that we could work by ourselves. Instead, it is the Holy Spirit who works these fruits of faith in us. These too are obvious and against such things there are no laws. We are free to love. We are free to serve one another with kindness and patience and goodness. We are free to live a life filled with joy and peace and self-control. We are free because our old sinful self has been crucified with Christ. That’s where we look each day - to the cross. There we find our forgiveness, our help, our freedom.

Talk about an awesome freedom. You are free from sin and that means peace instead of guilt, life instead of death, heaven instead of hell. It means the devil is no longer our master. We can live in His grace, instead of a life in fear. All our sins are taken away because of Jesus. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Thank God for such freedom. Thank God for all our freedoms, but especially thank Him today for freeing you from sin and freeing you for service. That’s a freedom worth fighting for - a wonderful, glorious freedom indeed. Amen.