

“Life of Freedom, Part 2”
Psalm 30; Luke 10:1-11, 16; Galatians 5:1, 13-25; 6:1-4
Salem United Methodist Church
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Rev. Dr. Sue Shorb-Sterling

This weekend we celebrate the 240th anniversary of our nation’s Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. When King George III ordered oppressive measures on the thirteen American colonies, they wanted their freedom. But long before this declaration was written, the Apostle Paul declared our freedom in Christ. This sermon is the second part of a two part sermon on what a Life of Freedom in Christ is.

Last week I began the sermon talking about as citizens of the United States we are proud of our individual freedoms which are protected under our Constitution. These freedoms which are part of the Bill of Rights include: the freedom to worship any god in any way we choose, the freedom to speak and write what is on our minds and in our hearts, the freedom to assemble peaceably, the freedom to keep and bear arms. We have fought to protect these freedoms, argued about how to uphold them, and tested them in our courts. Many lives have been lost to both protect and claim these individual freedoms.

Last week’s sermon also identified the difference between our individual freedoms protected by our Constitution and our freedom in Christ. Our freedom in Christ supersedes our individual freedoms. Freedom in Christ can be lived under any flag, any regime, or any government. This being said as American Christians we are blessed that we can assemble freely to worship Jesus Christ in the style that we choose. Last week I also gave the example of how the early Christians boldly and publicly claimed their allegiance to Christ over their allegiance to the Roman Caesar. To do so, they risked arrest, torture, and death. History records these martyrs proclaiming Jesus as they were being beaten, mutilated, mauled, and burned alive. There is a distinct difference between our freedom in Christ and our constitutional freedoms.

So what is this freedom in Christ that Paul describes in his letter to the Galatians? Paul proclaimed that those who believe in Jesus do not have to be imprisoned by the Jewish Law. With Jesus, they are free from the daily rigor of being obedient to Law of Moses. Their relationship with Christ is to be based on love and not the Law. When we have the love of Christ in our hearts, we will act in loving ways which is really the basis of the Law of Moses. In the time of Paul there were Christians who were slaves, property of their owners. Even as enslaved individuals, they could be free in Christ. Freedom in Christ is the freedom to love as Christ loved no matter what our circumstances are, no matter which government is in power. Freedom in Christ does not depend on one’s status or one’s citizenship.

Our freedom in Christ does not rely on our own human power. If this was left up to us, we will succumb to our selfish desires every time. Paul sees being free as surrendering to God’s Spirit and denying our selfish desires. We could say that this freedom in Christ is to surrender what God wants of us and not what we want. When we pledge our allegiance to something else before we pledge our allegiance to God, then we stand in opposition to God’s will. Martin Luther described this as being wrapped up in one’s self. Freedom in Christ is allowing the Spirit to unwrap or unravel us from our closed, dark existence into being free to live in love before God and each other. That is the gift of the Spirit-freedom!

Like our national freedoms, our freedom in Christ is constantly being threatened. We can be caught up in the outer and inner battles, between our selfish desires and the guiding of the Spirit. There may be times in which we ignore the Spirit’s guidance and our freedom in Christ. We want what we want. Not even the Spirit is able to tell us what to do! So we begin to wrap ourselves up again. Or we can feel as though the Spirit is asking too much of us. We just aren’t able to do what the Spirit is asking of us. The cost is too great, so we begin to wrap ourselves up again. So there is this type of tug of war between the Spirit freeing us to live in Christ and wanting to wrap ourselves up where we feel safe and secure. This is a great example of what sin is. Our opposition to what the Spirit of God offers us, the freedom to love as Christ loves.

Paul so boldly makes a list of the vices that entangle, that dominate our attitudes and relationships. These can be divided into two areas: those that ensnare our relationship with God and those that ensnare or

threaten our relationship with others. There are two items listed for those that ensnare our relationship with God: idolatry and casting spells. Idolatry refers to the second commandment, “You must have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3). What are the gods we place before God? What do we worship instead of worshipping God? Think about what do we focus on more than we focus on our relationship with God? Careers, money both acquiring it and spending it, recreation, our political process, fashion and glamorization, to name a few. Do you focus on something more than you focus on God? If so, what is it? The second item mentioned is “casting spells.” This sounds like witchcraft which I don’t think any of us practice, but when we wish ill of another whether in thought or word, we are not honoring God because that person is a creation of God.

The second area of vices that ensnare our relationship with each other is a long one: sexual immorality, moral corruption, doing whatever feels good, drug use, hate, fighting, obsession, losing your temper, competitive opposition, conflict, selfishness, group rivalry, jealousy, drunkenness, partying, and other things like that. Remember Paul was speaking to people who lived in the first century and here we are in the 21st century. He could be writing to us today. Our culture glorifies each and every one of these. This kind of behavior is considered the norm today. We are being conditioned through advertisements, through the entertainment industry, through the media that this is the way we are to live. Each is a means of entanglement, a means of spiritual imprisonment; and for some, they do lead to prison sentences. These attitudes and actions are destructive and divisive to living in community.

But the good news is that these do not need to entangle us. And here is what freedom in Christ looks like. When we are free in Christ, we bear the fruit of the Spirit. Notice the word is singular, fruit, not fruits. The image suggests that all these are related to the other. These nine qualities of freedom can be divided into three areas. The first area is the foundation of our freedom in Christ: love, peace, and joy. These are the building blocks of freedom. When Jesus sent the seventy-two into the villages, they were to offer peace, love, and joy. Jesus warned them that these gifts may not be received, but they were to continue offering them because there would be those who would receive them. The second area of the Spirit’s fruit includes practical attitudes and actions that build community: patience, kindness, and goodness. When we offer these to one another, we build bonds and trust that endure and last, even when we disagree. When we are patient, kind, and offer goodness, we are more readily able to forgive when we hurt each other. Also when these qualities are present we can share our burdens with each other in the confidence that we will find the support and encouragement we need. The third area of the Spirit’s fruit offers us ways to endure the battles of self-will and the Spirit. These are faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. When we begin to feel ourselves being entangled by the vices of selfish desires, we need to have faith that the Spirit will disentangle us, free us of them. Secondly, the Spirit offers us self-control to thwart off these desires so we can be free to love, to offer peace, and to live in joy. And also the Spirit offers us gentleness when we are in the midst of these battles. In these moments we need to be gentle with ourselves and with others.

The Spirit is more powerful than we are. To be free in Christ is to participate in the liberty of the Spirit. But to truly be free in Christ one needs to be constantly vigilant of ourselves in our daily reality, and constantly vigilant in our communion or our relationship with our liberator, Jesus Christ. The laws and individual freedoms of our nation only provide a framework of what we can and cannot do. The laws of any nation can only limit our selfish desires with their agreed-upon punishments, but no law can make any society just or loving. This comes only from experiencing true freedom in Christ. There is no law against this. Serve each other in love.

References: “The Bill of Rights,” www.archives.gov; *Freedom is for Freeing* by Phillip Potter