

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Pentecost 3C (Proper 8C)
June 29, 2025
Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Gospel Freedom

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. . . . 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:1, 13-14 ESV)

Dearly Beloved,

Later this week, our nation will celebrate Independence Day. There'll be talk about "liberty" and "freedom." And because those terms are so identified with our country, people from other lands want to come here. They want to be free – free from religious, political, and economic oppression, tyranny, and other intrusive governmental control over their lives. And they're often willing to risk everything they have, sometimes even their lives, to obtain this freedom for themselves or their family.

Yet, such freedom doesn't come without cost. When you think back to what you learned about our country's struggle for freedom and independence, you undoubtedly remember those who risked everything, including their very lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor to obtain it. And throughout the years since, men and women have fought to maintain our freedom, even as others from without and within have sought to destroy it. Indeed, freedom and liberty come about only at great cost and are maintained only by great vigilance.

Still, Beloved, we are not here today to celebrate a national holiday or thump our chests about how great we are. Instead, we are here to listen to our Lord and rejoice in the freedom He gives us. Thus, when St. Paul tells us, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. . . . For you were called to freedom, brothers," he isn't talking about political freedom and liberty. Rather, he's referring to spiritual freedom. You see, by nature we're in bondage to sin, death, and the devil. Jesus tells us, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). That's us! By nature, we live according to the flesh. And what does this look like? Listen as Paul describes it: "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these." Not a pretty picture is it, though it does describe our age? Living however we want is ugly business and it hurts us even as it divides us from one another. Yet, the worst part is that living such a life results in eternal condemnation, eternal separation from God. Paul tells us, "that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." That's serious! Take those words to heart and repent! Repent of your works of the flesh and the harm they cause – to you and to others.

For at the same time, “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth ” (1 Tim. 2:4). God declares, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11). Therefore, He sent His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in this sin-filled world. The second Person of the Trinity became flesh. He took on human form and nature, yet was without sin. He was tempted in every way we are, yet never gave in. For you see, He was totally free. He wasn't born with a fallen nature for He was the very Son of God. He was perfect. He was totally free to live a life of perfect faith in His Father and obedience to Him. His perfect freedom as the Son of God led Him to be enslaved in a life of service to us. And that led Him to set His face to go to Jerusalem where He would be taken as a prisoner and nailed to the cross to bear the sins of the whole world. And that means He set His face to save you, to take upon Himself all of your sins too. Our sinful impulses were nailed to the cross with Jesus. He suffered the damnation we deserve. Thus, we have been set free from sin and death and hell and it was all Christ's doing. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). Jesus is “the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

And just as we need to be vigilant to keep our political freedoms, so we need to be vigilant to keep our spiritual freedom. For, you see, we face threats to our liberty from many sides, threats which would place us back in our old way of living in bondage. And these threats come from the devil, the world and, even, from within ourselves. For now, though, we consider two. First of all, we are tempted to try to earn God's favor by what we do. That's what was happening to the Galatians. They were being tempted to rely on their own works for salvation. "Faith in Jesus isn't enough," they were told by the false teachers. "You've got to follow the Jewish laws too." That's why Paul warns them, and us, to beware of such a thing. Our works will not save us or get us to heaven. Indeed, all our works are stained by sin. We dare not think we can earn or contribute to our salvation in even the least amount. For if we want to live under the Law again, we will discover how cruel a master it is. For the Law always accuses us of our failure to keep it.

The second threat to our liberty is the temptation to think that our liberty gives us license to sin. We might be tempted to think that since we are no longer under the law and are free from God's wrath, we can do anything we want. After all, “God will forgive me anyway.” And that idea is just as dangerous as thinking we can earn God's favor. If you don't think so, consider what happens when political freedom knows no bounds. Sin is condoned with the cry, "It's a free country." "I can do what I want." “Who are you to judge me?” People claim "freedom of speech" to justify pornography and other so-called explicit artwork as well as so much else. People claim a right to all manner of perversions and delusions as though they are natural and not sinful. Indeed, many people think that they can say or do anything they want - all under the guise of freedom and liberty. And they try to force others to accept and approve whatever that is, even, and especially when it is contrary to God's Word and, even, nature itself.

In the spiritual realm, when we think we can use our liberty to sin, we find ourselves back in bondage to sin. If we use our freedom to indulge the flesh, we don't love our neighbor as ourselves. If we give way to the works of the flesh, we will bite and devour one another. We will live in enmity with God and with others. There will be no end to the strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, and divisions in our world, our families, and even in the Church.

Why is this so important? Because such a life wars against the Spirit. Our Lord wants only the best for us and that's life with Him now and forever. He wants us to give up the works of the flesh and live in His grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness.

And when we thus live in Christ, we receive the fruit of the Spirit too. Not that it is a result of our works, but because it is of the Spirit whom we receive by faith. As we live in true Christian freedom, that is, as we live by faith, we will enjoy "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control." These gifts, this fruit, are His gifts to us to enjoy all the days of our lives. And as such "fruit of the Spirit" has its way with us, we will lovingly serve our neighbor and consider his needs before our own. And the reason we can love others at all is because we have first received God's love for us. "We love because He first loved us." (1 John 4:19).

So how does this fruit show itself in our lives? When we are engaged in "teaching the erring; comforting the afflicted; encouraging the weak; helping the neighbor in whatever way one can; bearing with his rude manners and impoliteness; putting up with annoyances, labors, and the ingratitude and contempt of men in both church and state; obeying the magistrates; treating one's parents with respect; being patient in the home with a cranky wife and an unmanageable family, and the like" (LW 27, 56). And, in case you're wondering, that's from Luther. Yet, that is a good description of "fruit of the Spirit" life.

We who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. For when we were baptized, we were made a new person. Through the forgiveness of sins we receive by faith we are free from the wrath of God now and for eternity. And as we live in true Christian liberty, we will love our neighbor as ourselves. "If we live in the Spirit," which we do, "let us also walk in the Spirit." Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener