

# SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

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### Celebrate Your Freedom

#### Galatians 5:1,13-25

<sup>NIV</sup> Galatians 5:1 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. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. <sup>16</sup> So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law. <sup>19</sup> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

If you ask Americans what they are celebrating on this Fourth of July, perhaps the response you would get most often is "Freedom." We Americans take great pride in the fact that we live in a free country. And on this one day of the year—July 4<sup>th</sup>—we show our love of freedom with a big celebration. How will you celebrate freedom on this day? Many of you will have a gathering of some sort with family and friends. There's a good chance this gathering will involve a grill and some hamburgers and hot dogs. I'm sure that many of you will also watch fireworks. This is how we celebrate freedom in America—we eat and we explode things. This morning we're going to talk about a different kind of freedom—not political freedom, but rather spiritual freedom. Let's take some time thinking about how we celebrate the spiritual freedom that we have in Christ.

Before we can discuss how we celebrate freedom, we first have to realize what it means to be free. Just as Americans are often tempted to take their freedoms for granted, we are tempted to take for granted the freedom that Christ has given us as well. The apostle Paul begins this fifth chapter of his letter to the Galatians with a simple statement: "*It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.*" That phrase contains two important truths: we have freedom and Christ is the one who has given it to us. These truths imply that we needed to be set free. Why? You and I were born in a free country. None of us have ever been slaves or lived under a tyrannical ruler. Of course, this is not the kind of slavery that Paul is writing about. He is writing about spiritual matters. And, in a spiritual sense, we were all born slaves. We were enslaved by sin and unable to do anything about it. Without liberation, the devil with his lies would be our master throughout our earthly lives and we would have only eternal death and damnation to look forward to at the end.

But Jesus changed all that for us. He did it through his perfect life and innocent death. He did it by keeping all the commands of God that we have broken. He did it by taking upon himself the punishment for our sin. He did it by suffering hell in our place. He did it by breaking the power of sin, death and the devil through his triumphant resurrection. Through faith in Jesus, we are free. What does it mean to be free? It means that we are forgiven. It means that the devil can't accuse us because those sins have been washed away. It means that we need not be riddled by guilt because Christ's sacrifice has paid for our sins in full. It means that we don't have to fear death, because Jesus has transformed our death into a gateway to eternal life. What a tremendous blessing to know and experience this spiritual liberation that Christ brings into our lives!

It is because this freedom is so great that the apostle Paul was astonished that there were some in Galatia who were giving up that freedom. There were some who were teaching that Gentiles needed to follow the ceremonial laws and traditions of the Jews, such as circumcision and refraining from eating certain foods, in order to be saved. They were placing an unnecessary burden on their brothers in the faith. They were ignoring the freedom that Christ provides and trying to return to a yoke of slavery--to the Law of Moses. This is completely contrary to the truth God has revealed in his Word. That is why the apostle Paul wrote, "*Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*"

We also have to be careful to keep ourselves from abusing our Christian freedom in this way. I don't think there is a danger of any of us trying to reinstate the OT Ceremonial law here at Cross of Glory. There is, however, a temptation for us to make our traditions into a type of ceremonial law and make it seem as though you *must* do things in a certain way, even when the Lord has not commanded it. There are areas we call *adiaphora*—they have neither been commanded nor forbidden by God. This includes the order of worship we use, the style of music we sing, the vestments the pastors wear, and the methods we use to teach and preach the gospel. We certainly cannot give an inch on what God says in his Word. But we must be careful that we don't make up our own ceremonial laws and try to place a burden on our brothers and sisters in Christ in areas where we have freedom. This can only lead to strife and discord among the body of Christ. As the apostle warns: "*If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*"

The apostle Paul warns about another abuse of Christian freedom in the next verse of our text when he writes, "*You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature.*" It is great to have freedom in Christ. It is great to know that you are forgiven. Unfortunately, some people use this wonderful truth as an opportunity to go out and sin even more. The thought is: if I have forgiveness from God, why not go and have a little fun along the way? Of course, this is the sinful flesh talking. The sinful flesh has a different idea of fun than the Spirit of God does. The apostle Paul gives quite a long list of things that sound fun to the sinful nature: *sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;*<sup>20</sup> *idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions*<sup>21</sup> *and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.* These things all have one thing in common: they fulfill the desires of the flesh. Taking part in such activities is not a way to use your Christian freedom, it is an abuse of that freedom.

Although the flesh might think these activities are appealing, they are actually very harmful. Living according to your sinful flesh is not liberating. It is enslaving. You become trapped by guilt and regret. You end up damaging the relationships you have in life. You end up hurting those who are close to

you. Worst of all, you can end up damaging the most important relationship you have in your life—the relationship with your Lord. Christ did not free you so that you could go indulge your sinful nature in every way possible. The freedom Christ provides you enables you to do just the opposite: to live not for yourselves but to serve Christ and others.

This brings us back to the question: how do you celebrate your spiritual freedom? The answer the apostle Paul provides is an ironic one: you celebrate your freedom by being a servant. As he writes: “*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."*” Christian freedom is all about service. That might not sound like freedom at first, until we realize what kind of service we are talking about. This is not service because we have to serve, this is service done out of love. That is what makes all the difference. Our love and gratitude to Jesus for the freedom he has given us makes us want to serve him and show love to others.

And just what does this celebration of freedom look like in our lives? The apostle Paul gives a good description when he lists the various fruits of the Spirit: “*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.*” We could spend hours talking about each of these fruits of the Spirit individually and discussing how we can work on showing them in our lives. But for the moment, let’s simply emphasize one thing about this list. Notice how these fruits are the exact opposite of the desires of the sinful nature. Those desires were all about satisfying yourself and your own cravings. The fruits of the Spirit are all about controlling yourself and looking out for the needs of others by showing love, living in peace, exercising patience, showing kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness. As you are liberated by Christ, there is a certain joy that is found in expressing that freedom through putting other’s needs above your own.

It takes work to celebrate your freedom in this way. Your sinful nature constantly wants to abuse the freedom Christ has given you. Your sinful nature wants you to be a slave to tradition or a slave to your desires. And there are times you will abuse that freedom. That is when you need to remember the blessed truth that Christ *has* set you free. Your sins *are* forgiven. Celebrate that freedom every day. Give thanks to God. Serve one another in love. **Amen.**

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