

Sermon June 26, 2016 - Pentecost 6

Called to Freedom

Galatians 5:1, 13–25



Dear friends in Christ

In a few days we will be observing and celebrating Canada Day. We will celebrate the start, the birth of Canada, but, and most importantly the freedom we enjoy, freedom unlike other peoples around the world.

By the way June 20th was world refugee day. Remembering all those who are displaced because of war, political unrest or persecuted, those whose

wish and desire is to have freedom the same way we do have here.

Of the many who are displaced and living in refugee camps, life is not ease, yet organization like CLWR are helping people to make the best given their situation, so that a glimpse of freedom if not collective at least individual in a large context of a refugee camp. Here is an example from a Syrian refugee camp, let's watch: (Video)

I'm glad organizations like CLWR are helping communities that have experiences these hardships all over the world, and helping individuals to develop themselves so they too can be free, or at least enjoy a glimpse of freedom.

After all we all want freedom don't we. We do have freedom in Canada, freedom from oppressing forces that keep people enslaved. Or, do we really have freedom, political freedom, that is?

Now our meditation this morning is not so much on social issues or political freedom, but another freedom that yes! can affect our social and political freedom as we shall see. It is the freedom, the true freedom that comes through Christ. Only through Christ there is true freedom.

Doesn't matter if we live in a political free country like our beautiful Canada, but if we are and remain in the prison that holds the human spirit captive we are not free. And what holds captive our human spirit is sin, our sins.

Although we do have freedom in this country but if our spirits are captive by sin, we would still make bad and poor choices, we will do that which keeps us grounded and enslaved. Poor decisions are made when we consider only our own desires and place ourselves in the center of our universe disregarding God and his will for us. As somebody said: "A man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes."¹

And what makes us to do only what we like, to place ourselves in the center of our universe is sin, and the fact that we have been enslaved by it. Our desires and thoughts are captive of sin.

That's why the apostle Paul tells us in the epistle this morning: "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."

¹ Thomas Huxley, "Address on University Education," Collected Essays, 1902, III, 236.

The fact is that for those who are in Christ, those who have been baptized, those who have confessed the Christian faith, were at one time, enslaved to sin (v 1). Were dead in their wrong doings, their spirit was captive to death and condemnation.

That' was our past, "For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another." (Titus 3:3) But that is the past, that's what we were. We are now different, or at least we should.

Yet, we know that even though we are Christians, we seem to fall back to our old ways. We are disobedient, we are led astray easily but the trends, the fashion of belief of our times. We let the passions of our flesh dictate our actions. And yes, there is envy and hatred among Christians.

But hear again what Paul tells us: "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." Did you hear that? You are free and that freedom enables you to serve others in love. In that freedom when we serve others I love we do affect our social conditions in our community and yes in one way or another will influence our political life as well. Because whatever we do as Christians will have an effect on others, it should. And if it hasn't done it yet, maybe now is the time to do so.

And it start with these simple questions, are we serving one another as it should? As God desires for us? Or are we trying to please ourselves more than serving others? Didn't Jesus command us to love one another?

But it is true, we are not able to keep God's commandments to the fullest; it is because we are not in Heaven yet. It is because we are sinful human beings. That's why! And because we like being slaves to sin, even if we don't realize it, we do become slaves to sin. But this enslavement takes away our life, both physical and eternal, as we are told: "For the wages of sin is death," (Rom 6:23a).

But as always, here is the good news, it doesn't have to be like that. Because Christ has set us free (v 1a). He has called us to freedom, the freedom that he won for us, the freedom that he came to earth to bring (Jn 8:31–32, 36).

He obtained the victory for us through his suffering, death, and resurrection. He paid the ransom price to buy our freedom (Mt 20:28). He gives us his victory over death (Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 15:57). He has forgiven us our sins, our disobedience, our being led astray and brings us to the correct path. And when we had let the passions of our flesh dictate our actions, God forgave all of that, all through and because of Christ. All envy and hatred among Christians is forgiven and removed, rather replaced with his love. Christ has done it all for us.

Therefore, Paul, tells us: "Do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." With these words he reminds us what we were once, and what we are now through Christ. What God has made us into through faith in Christ received through baptism. Through baptism Christ has called us out of the darkness of these poor choices, into the light of Christ. Into freedom, true freedom, freedom to walk by the spirit. And to walk in the spirit means not walking in and by the force of God's laws but in the forgiveness of Christ, in the forgiveness that he won for us.

Now, here is another truth, because we live in God's forgiveness and not by the weight of the law, it is easy to fall back into the slavery of sin again. Yes we do have the

forgiveness of our sins, but, so we enjoy and live in the state of forgiveness God wants and desires for us to walk in the power of the Spirit.

Paul says, do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (v 13). “The flesh” is our sinful nature. It is totally self-centered and cares nothing for others (Rom 7:5; Phil 2:3–4).

The deeds of the flesh are so painfully evident! And ugly (vv 19–21a). Sexual sins: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality. Sins of idolatry, sins against our fellowship with the neighbor: enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy. And . . . things like these. The list goes on! These hurt not only others, but destroy us too (v 15). And see just how serious are the consequences (21b). Eternal slavery!

But see how different it is when you walk in Spirit (vv 16–17). When a Christian walks in the Spirit, there is a strong sense of serving others in the fruit of the spirit. (v 13). One of the purposes of freedom is to love and serve our neighbor (v 14; Eph 4:32). “For” this “freedom Christ has set us free.” Paul tells us. To serve our neighbor in all its needs, not only through Canadian World Relief who is doing a great job among those who are in need of freedom, but even here in our midst, in our congregation, in our families. There the Lord invites and enables us to show and express, actually to practice and produce the fruits of the Spirit (v 22–23).

Picture the church, this congregation, the home, your circle of friends walking this way! Loving each of us, speaking kind words to each other, praying for each other, encouraging each other, plunging ourselves into a special bond with each one. It will look amazing, it will look different. It will be a peace of heaven here on earth. It will be our home. In some secular circles it has happened. One of the movies my kids love is called “Freedom Writers” I would like to show a short clip from that movie (video)

Now, imagine if this can happen in a school, how much more can happen in God’s House?

Love, care, kindness, these are fruit of the freedom you have in Christ (v 24). His being crucified has set us free from death and hell. We are free! No need to keep fighting about petty things among brothers and sisters. All is forgiven and forgotten, that’s is true freedom (vv 25, 18).

In Christ, we have been set free. We are no longer under the Law but are led by the Spirit. That Spirit-led life brings us joy and peace in Christ and keeps us from the works of the flesh. Thanks be to God that for freedom Christ has set us free. Amen.