

Independence Day Weekend

July 5, 2020

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Kids may not use the word, but they know what it feels like to have freedom. It's that feeling you get when school is over for the summer and three months of fun await you. It's that feeling that you get when you are at the park going as high as you could go on a swing. It's that feeling that you get as you leave on a family vacation, and new adventures lie ahead. Many of us might remember that feel of freedom of being a kid in summer. Before we know it, summer is over and freedom seems to once again be out of reach.

Adults know how freedom feels also. It's that feeling that you get when you have a day off, and you have nothing that you HAVE to do today. That feeling you get when you can lift up your feet and sit down on a chair under the shade of a tree with a cold drink in hand. Yet, we all know that it doesn't last. Soon we once again find ourselves tied to all the different responsibilities we all have in life. We have work responsibilities. We have family commitments. We have volunteer commitments to fulfill. We must make money to pay the bills. We must mow the lawn and scrub the floor. We must check our inbox and respond to our voice mail. We must do this and must do that. Sometimes, freedom just seems to be out of reach.

As a nation this weekend, we have celebrated freedom. Even though it may not have been like other 4th of July's with parades and fireworks, it is still a time to celebrate. For many, it is a moment to forget all the things that divide people. It is a moment to pause in life and give thanks for all the freedom that we do enjoy. But it is also a time to realize that freedom can also seem to be just out of reach.

Freedom. Paul's letter to the Galatians has a lot to say about freedom. The freedom that Paul talks about is a freedom that is better than summer vacation; better than a day off; better than the freedom that we enjoy in our country. In Galatians, chapter 3, the Apostle Paul says that **"the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin."** (Gal. 3:22) When we look at the demands that God's law demands from us, we realize that we are guilty and nothing that we can do can remove that guilt. We are like the prisoner who has done wrong. The law says that we are guilty. There is nothing that you and I can do to set ourselves free from that guilt. We are a prisoner of sin.

Yet, what does Paul say in our text? **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."** The picture is that of someone coming along and unlocking the door of our prison and says that you are free. Who is that someone? Christ. I heard a story that went something like this. Grandma and Grandpa were watching their young grandchild. The child had done something really naughty. Grandma picked up that child and said to him: *"we don't do that in this house."* She picked up the child and placed him into one of those pack-n-plays. She told him: *"you are going to have a time out for the next two minutes."* You can guess what happened next. He started crying his head off. She left him cry and went into the other room for the next two minutes. About 1 minute into the time out, things got completely silent in the other room. She's begins to think that maybe he climbed out or escaped his prison. When she went into the other room, she saw that the child hadn't climbed out. What happened was that grandpa had climbed in. Grandpa was so upset that this young child was crying and facing his punishment alone that he said that he was going to climb in and be there with you. (It wasn't me; but I would probably consider it.)

God did one better than that. He looked at this world that was being held as a prisoner of sin. So, what does he do? He climbs into that prison of sin. He doesn't do that to be with us as we face punishment, but to be punished instead of us. Why? So that we can be truly free. **"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."** God saw how we can't meet the demands of his law, and so he sends Jesus to set us free. He sets us free from the punishment of sin. Jesus goes to the cross. Through his suffering and death, the Father took all that weight of guilt of sin off our backs. He set us free.

Yet, freedom always has some constraints. Just because a child is free to run around in the yard with a baseball, he isn't free to throw that ball through the neighbor's window on purpose. Just because I have a driver's license, it doesn't mean that I can drive as fast as I want and where I want. Just because I have freedom to say what I want, it doesn't mean that I can say things that intentionally hurt someone else.

Christian freedom doesn't mean that I can do anything that I want. It means being free to do what God has created me to do. He created us to serve him and to serve others. That's what Paul means when he speaks about freedom in our text. **"But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."** Instead, he says: **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."**

Over the last couple of weeks or so, I've been watching a nest of cardinals just outside of my office window. After a short time, you could see two little mouths poking out the top of the nest. Mom and dad would fly in and out of the nest to feed those little mouths. It wasn't long before they got bigger. The time came this week for the birds to leave the nest. In just a day, they ventured outside the nest and up and down in the bush. It was fascinating to watch mom and dad helping and encouraging them to fly. In a matter of a couple of hours, they were gone. They had been set free to be what God had made them to be – birds. God has given us freedom that will last an eternity. Cherish your freedom in Christ. Amen.