

## “Freedom Fruit”

Liturgical Date: Proper 8 (C)

Primary Text: Galatians 5:1, 13-25

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Third Sunday after Pentecost, is the Epistle Lesson from Galatians 5. The title of the sermon is “Freedom Fruit”.

Today’s Epistle text contains the familiar and loved verses on the “fruit of the spirit.” (v22-23) The flesh and the Spirit are contrasted. And prior to the main body of the text, verse 1 is included, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”* That one verse, perhaps more than any other, captures the whole theme of the book of Galatians. Its message is the theme that runs through the whole letter to the churches of Galatia. “You Christians are free. Don’t listen to these legalists who tell you that you have to be circumcised, observe certain feasts, and avoid certain foods to be a Christian. You have liberty. Don’t be deceived into putting yourself back into bondage to the Law.”

Galatians is such a wonderful book that proclaims the forgiveness and freedom that we have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ in that we are saved by grace through faith. In is no wonder that Martin Luther loved this book of the Bible as much as he did. Luther’s commentary on Galatians is seen as one of his finest works and I can’t imagine that a Lutheran pastor anywhere would go through seminary without studying Galatians closely.

The Greek word that is translated as “liberty” here in the KJV/NKJV is *eleutheria*. It can also be translated as “freedom”, which is how the ESV

translates it. In Galatians' six chapters, we see this Greek word used 9 times. "Liberty and Freedom." Hmm...perhaps this could be an Independence Day sermon a week early. Especially as Americans we like liberty and freedom. Even in our divisive time, I think "liberty and freedom" would still poll pretty high as American values. The British were trying to boss us around, but we didn't take it lightly. Groups like the Sons and Daughters of Liberty started a movement for independence. We would be free, declaring our independence from oppressive British rule. It would take a bloody Revolutionary War, but our freedom would be secured. The torch of Lady Liberty would shine. Of course, no nation including our own, is perfect. When we declared independence in 1776, there were still things that would need to be dealt with like abolishing slavery and extending voting rights to women. But we have stood for freedom. Even when our country was founded the amount of voting rights, ability to criticize our own government, and religious freedom by not having a state church were all pretty "revolutionary" compared to other places in the world. Yes, we like liberty and we want freedom to ring.

So, the theme of Galatians likely strikes a positive cord with most Americans. But we also know that with freedom comes responsibility. Just because you have the right to do something, does not mean you should do it. Case in point: There was once a young enforcement agent for the federal land bureau. He was sent out West on an assignment to ensure that the ranchers were complying with federal regulations. In his training, he was instructed that these western farmers often have a strong independent streak and don't like the feds poking around their land. They told him, if anyone resists pull out your official badge and tell them you have the authority to go anywhere on their

property. Now this young agent was enthusiastic, but a little arrogant in his ability to throw his weight around. He was inspecting one rancher's land and the rancher told him he could not go past one particular fence on his property. Before the rancher could even explain further, the young agent whipped out his badge and said that it gave him the authority to go anywhere on the man's property. The rancher protested, "young man, I am telling you don't go in there." The agent fired back, "Why not, what are you hiding over there? I am going to check it out." Once again, the response was, "don't go in there." The agent was very forceful at this point, "You see this badge sir? This badge gives me the freedom to go anywhere I darn well please on your property. Do you see this badge? I can do what I want here. You back off because I have this badge". The rancher shrugged his shoulders, lifted his hands up and says, "well how can argue with that badge, have it your way." The young enforcement agent entered the gate and began to look around. It wasn't but a few moments until he saw a very large and agitated bull coming toward him. And it had big horns. The agent looked down and realized it was probably not a good idea that he had worn a red shirt that day! The bull began to charge and the agent took off. As he ran past the now grinning rancher, he shouted out, "Do something! Get this bull to stop chasing me. Help!" The rancher hollered back, "Why don't you just show that bull your badge? Show him your badge!."

The point is that freedom, liberty, nor authority is something that should be used unwisely. On July 4 and other holidays, we celebrate the political freedom that we have as Americans. But the freedom that we see in our text is spiritual freedom. What have we been freed from? We have been freed from the bondage of sin. We have been freed from the control of the devil. We have been

freed from death. We have been freed from the yoke of bondage to the Law. But what do we do with this freedom? Some have twisted this liberty to argue that this means that a Christian is free to do whatever they please. There is no more use for the Law at all, they would say. This erroneous thinking is grace abuse, antinomianism. As Christians, we must never separate the liberty that we have been so graciously granted from the work of the Holy Spirit. Martin Luther put it this way, *“A human liberty has been achieved when laws are changed while men remain unchanged. But a Christian liberty has been achieved when men are changed while the Law remains unchanged, so that the same Law which formerly was hateful to free will now becomes welcome, because through the Holy Spirit love has been diffused in our hearts.”*

Verse 13 of Galatians 5, *“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”* Our liberty should be used to serve God and others. Again from Luther, *“A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.”* When you understand this seemingly paradoxical statement, you understand the Christian life. Yes, Christians are free. But we have not been freed to become self-absorbed, selfish, arrogant, nor sinners on steroids. We are free to be servants of God and our neighbor as verse 14 says. We are not under a yoke of Law-bondage, trying to work our way to heaven, no but we are people who should freely love and do right.

Our text made this clear. There are many military terms in the book of Galatians, as this region had a high population of mercenary soldiers. “Opportunity” in verse 13 in Greek is literally “a base of operations”. Liberty is

our base of operations as Christians. If we use our base of liberty to fight with each other, we fail (v15). If we use our liberty to fulfil the lusts of our flesh, we fail (v16). There is a war going on within us. Verse 17 again contains military imagery. What our text translates as “lusts” can also be translated as “wars.” The flesh opposes the Spirit. We face decisions every day in which we will give in to the sinful desires of our flesh, or we will submit to and be guided by the Holy Spirit. And the good news is that God the Holy Spirit has indwelled us at our Baptism, at our point of conversion. We are not alone in this war. Our liberty can be used in a Godly manner if we “Walk in the Spirit” and “not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” (v16)

As I have said before, St. Paul was a “list guy.” Throughout his inspired writings he will give contrasting lists. We see an example of that in Galatians 5. In Verses 20-21 we are given examples of the works of the flesh: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and in typical Paul fashion he adds, “and the like.” Not a complete list, but a pretty thorough one here. Then in contrast in verses 22-23 we are given the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are the things that God seeks to manifest in the life of the believer. These are the things that, in fact, will manifest themselves in the lives of one who is a believer.

A well-known evangelist once shared a story of a man who was really struggling in his life that had come to him for council. He asked the man if he felt like he had love. He replied “No”. Then he asked if he had joy. No. Peace? No. And down through the whole list the man answered no. This pastor then said

gently, but firmly. "I am not sure that you have the Holy Spirit. I have just gone through all the fruits of the Spirit that the Bible says Christians should have. You have none of them. I am concerned that you may not even be a Christian. Please pray to God about where your heart is." The man was originally upset by this answer, but upon examining his heart, he realized that he was far from God, and he would dedicate his life to serving Christ.

This is not to say that a Christian will have all of the fruits of the Spirit perfectly all the time and none of the things on the fleshly list any of the time. After all, it does take time for fruit to grow. It is not that one becomes a Christian and they never sin again. However, if you have the Holy Spirit-which by definition a Christian would-you should have some fruit. If you pointed to an oak tree and told me it was an apple tree, I could prove to you that it was not an apple tree over time. This would be proven by the fact that that tree would never grow any apples-it would be impossible for it to do so since it was not apply try. The only way an oak tree could ever grow apples is that if it could somehow be changed into an apple tree. Martin Chemnitz put it this way, *"True faith in Christ does not seek occasions or permissions to sin, but seeks the remission of sins and deliverance from it. Likewise, where sin rules and there is no struggle against our corrupt desires, there it is certain that the Holy Spirit is not present."* We must examine ourselves. Again, we will not have the fruit of the Spirit perfectly this side of heaven, but some fruit should be growing if the Spirit is there. In these areas where we struggle on that fleshly list, we should be at war against them fighting with the weapons of the Spirit-not just throwing up our hands and saying, "I have liberty so who cares." Again, another military term is used to close the passage, *"If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."* That walk in the

spirit can literally be translated as “be in line with the Spirit” or “keep in step with the Spirit”. The mighty army of God, marching in step to beat of the drum as laid down by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we can never forget a key aspect when we speak of things like this. We must understand this to truly understand Christian liberty. And that is that the fruit follows faith. The Formula of Concord puts it so well, *“Faith must be the mother and source of works that are truly good and well pleasing to God, which God will reward in this world and in the world to come.”* The Bible makes it clear that faith without works is dead, and it also makes it equally clear that good works cannot produce faith. If one were to look at these two lists and say, “uh-oh I think my life is more like the list of the works of the flesh” and then determine that they better just start behaving themselves better, they will fail.

That is because the fundamental truth here is that in Christian liberty we have the fruit of whom? The Spirit. We can’t change ourselves into a fruit tree. We can’t produce fruit on our own. The only way a person can be truly changed and produce good fruit is by the work of the Spirit. Notice that God does not say here in the Bible that He is giving a list of the “Fruit of well-behaved people”, but rather the list of the “Fruit of the Spirit.” This means exactly what it says. In faith, God grows this fruit, we cannot produce it ourselves. We cannot outwork our sinful flesh. To try to do so is impossible, a fool’s errand. The flesh must be mortified by the work of God. It is only through faith that we receive the Holy Spirit. It is only by faith that we receive the benefits of Jesus Christ’s blood shed for us on the cross. It is only by faith that we can walk in the Spirit. It is only by faith that we can love God and love our neighbor as ourselves. It is only by faith that the fruits of the Spirit are produced.

Nex weekend, celebrate your freedom, our liberty as Americans. We are truly blessed to live in a country with the freedom and opportunity that we have. And don't forget to celebrate your liberty as a Christian. Not a liberty to foolishly do whatever we want whenever we want to do it, but true freedom in Christ. Have joy that you don't have to be like a hamster constantly working to run on a wheel, but never really going anywhere. Have peace knowing that God has made peace with us through the cross. In this we can love God and others. In this liberty we can have patience through longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such there is no law.

Amen.