

**LIVE YOUR FREEDOM**

**July 2, 2017**

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

**Independence Sunday**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one in whom we truly have our freedom, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, amen.

Independence Day is coming up this Tuesday, the day we as a country celebrate the fact that we are free. Freedom is such a great blessing, but unless you’ve been a slave, or you’ve been in jail, you’ll probably never really know just how great it is to be free. What do you think is the biggest symbol of freedom in our country? Some might say the Statue of Liberty, standing in New York, welcoming all those who come to our country looking for freedom. Or maybe the biggest symbol of freedom is the flag. Maybe you have one in your front yard today.

Of all the people in the world, what group of people enjoy the greatest amount of freedom? Strangely, the answer is not Americans. Of all the people in the world, the people who enjoy the greatest amount of freedom are Christians. It’s true! Christians are the free-est people in the world. Many people would say that Christians aren’t free – they’re bound by all kinds of rules to live by. But that’s not true. Christians are free. In fact, a Christian living in communist China enjoys more freedom than an unbeliever living in America. Martin Luther once said, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.” In one of his infamous paradoxical statements he then added, “A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject of all, subject to all.” What Luther meant by these two seemingly opposite statements is that we Christians are freed by the blood of Christ from sin, death and the devil. We are no longer bound by the law because of the Grace of God displayed or proven through his love given to us in His Son’s death and resurrection. The other half of Luther’s statement is the one we sometimes have trouble with…

God, through Jesus Christ frees us from our sinful nature, but not so we can just continue living on our sin. We are freed for a purpose. That’s where the second part of the paradox comes into play. Christians are also dutiful servants, subject to all. As we are tied to Christ in his death and resurrection, we are also tied to Christ in the mission he began and turned over to us. That is a mission of service to all people. We even have it in our mission statement of our congregation, that’s how important it is to us. We seek, welcome, and serve all.

Our country sets aside one day each year to celebrate our freedom as a nation, but for a Christian, every Sunday worship service is a celebration of freedom, and every day is Independence Day. Today as we ponder our Christian freedom, I pray God is going to encourage us to live our freedom every day.

The freedom God talks about in the Bible is a special kind of freedom. In the first verse of our second reading from Paul’s letter to the church at Galatia, God speaks through the Apostle Paul, and says, “it is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yolk of slavery.” That yoke of slavery Paul was talking about here was the pressure of trying to earn your way to heaven. Every day, trying to be a perfect person, hoping to please God enough to someday earn your way into heaven – that’s slavery according to Paul and he tells the Galatians, “Christ has set you free from that. Christ has earned salvation for you. You are free from trying to earn your way to heaven, from frustration, from guilt, from fear. You’re free!” That’s the special kind of freedom God talks about here in the Bible.

Now in our country, we enjoy a great deal of political freedom. As Americans, we are free to believe whatever we want, to say whatever we want, and to do whatever we want, as long as we don’t break the law. Lots of people think our Constitution grants us these freedoms, but they’re wrong. In the Declaration of Independence, it clearly states we are endowed with certain inalienable rights from our creator. Our brave men and women in military service have fought to preserve these rights, but they come from God. We Americans believe that because we have a strong military we have freedom, but Christians know differently. You and I have been freed from our sins by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Today we have an American flag covering the elements of our Communion meal as a symbol of how our nation protects our freedom, especially our freedom to worship. As Americans, we’re politically free. As Christians, we’re spiritually free. What a comfort it is to know that for Jesus sake, God forgives you of all your sins. He did that by being the kind of person you and I could never be. He was loving, joyful, peaceful, patient; he was kind, good, faithful, gentle, and a man of self-control. Jesus was all these things. And he did that as our substitute. Although we have the flag of our country draping the bread, our real freedom comes through what’s under the flag. Jesus sacrificed his life on the cross for you and for me.

As you take the Lord’s Supper this morning, think about this as a sacrament of freedom. The body and blood of Christ, sacrificed for you, so that you could be free from guilt, free from fear, free from punishment. You are free. You can say “goodbye” to all those things, and live a new life of freedom.

Christ has set you free to love other people as you would love yourself. You are free to be a joyful person, to be peaceful. You are free to be patient when a person or life in general just won’t cooperate with you. Christ has set you free to be kind and good and faithful to those who are depending on you. Christ has set you free to be the most gentle person around, and to be a person of self-control. That’s what freedom looks like. You see, when you’re not trying to earn your way to heaven, when you’re not feeling guilty, or afraid – when you realize Christ has taken your sins away – then you really are free, and you can be this person, the one God created you to be. Even a Christian living in communist China, although limited by the laws of the land, but, as the Apostle Paul says, there is no law against these sorts of things, and in that way, as Christians, we can live out our freedom anywhere in the world.

Today, we see flags all over our community, symbols of freedom. To be free to live and to believe as we want - it really is something to thank God for. But even more than that, everyday we thank God for our spiritual freedom. Our symbol is the cross and at the foot of the cross, well that’s where our freedom begins and end. May the freedom that comes from Christ give you the strength and the courage to be the gentlest, most forgiving, most merciful freest servant of all. May God bless you as you live your freedom every day. Amen.