

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Pentecost 6  
July 4, 2021 (Independence Day)  
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft  
**Jesus set you free**

—Galatians 5:13

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Well-known words written in the Declaration of Independence. Today, we celebrate, in our nation, Independence. We celebrate the freedom that we are blessed with. Whenever I hear these words, I always wonder... What is the connection between liberty and happiness? If I am free, does that mean I can do whatever I want... whatever makes me happy? Well, I cannot speak toward the intentions of the Founding Fathers, although, I am fairly confident that the word, ‘happiness,’ held a different connotation back in their day. Yet, I can point us to the instructions of our God. In Paul’s letter to the church in Galatia, God’s will for us while living in freedom is clear. This will is not to pursue happiness. Let’s consider further this Christian Freedom. Let’s consider the fact that Jesus set you free.

To understand Paul’s instruction for the Galatians, we must consider the context of this verse. False teachers were going around saying that Christians needed to do something to be saved, saying that they needed to be circumcised. These false teachers not only taught this, but they also claimed that Paul taught this. In response, Paul had some harsh words for them. Then, Paul transitions to demonstrate that although good works are not how one is justified, they are not absent from the life of a Christian. Here Paul says, “*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.*” Paul speaks about living in freedom.

Of what kind of freedom is the Apostle Paul speaking? Is this political freedom? Is this the freedom that we as Americans experience? The freedom in which you get to cast a vote, buy some land, chose your occupation, and all the other freedoms that we are blessed with in this nation? Well no. It is not simply political freedom. Paul refers to a greater freedom. This freedom is not to do whatever one wants either. Paul was not telling the Galatians that they were set free to lie, cheat, and steal. This demonic freedom, as Luther once called it, is not true freedom. It is certainly not the freedom that Paul speaks of here. So, what is this freedom? As I previously referenced, Martin Luther lectured on this verse in 1535, and his sentiment is worth repeating. Dr. Luther said this regarding freedom, “This is the freedom with which Christ has set us free, not from some human slavery or tyrannical authority but from the eternal wrath of God.” Brothers and sisters, this is the freedom of which Paul spoke. This is the freedom to which Christians are called. In Christ Jesus, they are set free from the wrath of God.

We know that all people are, by nature, slaves to sin. Therefore, they are deserving of nothing but the eternal wrath of God, but Jesus Christ sets free. How did he do this? You know. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life in their place. Jesus Christ died an innocent death for them. Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrifice given for them. Because of what Jesus did, the Galatian Christians were set free from the wrath of God. They were also set free from their bondage to sin. They were set free from the power of the devil. Jesus set them free.

The freedom of which the Apostle Paul spoke can be compared to political freedom. Think back to the Declaration of Independence. This document declared that all citizens of the thirteen colonies were free. They were to be free from the power, rule, and domain of the British Empire. We benefit from this declaration of freedom. Yet, we know that this statement was not all-powerful. The British did not simply accept this declaration. A war was fought for their freedom from what was perceived as tyranny. Also, political freedom can be taken away. It is not eternal. It certainly did not protect the citizens of the colonies from their truest enemies, sin, death, and the devil. The freedom that comes in Christ Jesus is greater.

When Jesus set you free, you were truly set free. You are free from the wrath of God. Jesus faced the punishment that your sins deserved. Jesus paid the price in full. Jesus paid it all for you. Jesus did this for you because of how much he loves you. Because Jesus loves you, he was nailed to a cross. Because Jesus loves you, he suffered that pain. Because Jesus loves you, he faced the wrath of God. Now by God’s grace through Spirit-created faith, you know that you are free. You are free from slavery to sin. You are free from the tyranny of the devil. You are free indeed. This is as Jesus said regarding himself, “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.*” (John 8:36) You are free in Christ! Jesus set you free.

Thus far, we have walked through the freedom of which Paul spoke. After establishing that the Galatian Christians were free, Paul speaks about how they were to live in this freedom. The Galatians were no longer in the slavery of their sins. They were not bound to the works of the law. They did not have to try and save themselves. Jesus set them free.

Now, Paul gives them a warning. They were not to use their freedom from God's wrath as a license to sin. Instead, they had a different purpose. Let's look back to what Paul said, "*But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.*" There was a certain temptation that the Galatians faced. They had the temptation to use this freedom in a selfish way. Perhaps they thought... "Sure, I can get drunk tonight... I'm forgiven; I'm free from God's wrath." Or they thought... "I know coveting my neighbor's house is sinful... but hey, I'm forgiven, I'm free from God's wrath." Maybe they thought of their freedom as cheap grace and freedom to sin. I can't tell you what exactly the Galatians were tempted to think... but I am a human, and they were humans... and that sounds a lot like the thinking of humans. The Galatian Christians were not to use their freedom from God's wrath as a license to sin. No, in this freedom, they were to "*serve one another in love.*" This wasn't to save themselves... Jesus already did that. In Christ, they were now able to serve. They had the freedom to love their neighbor. They had the freedom to serve their neighbor. Jesus set them free, and now they were free to serve one another in love.

Last Sunday, Pastor Buchholz said something that resonated with me during Bible Class. He said, "The greatest freedom is slavery to Christ." I believe that this statement expresses well what Paul teaches in this verse. Christians are not free to sin. The New Person created in us by the Holy Spirit does not desire to sin. Instead, Jesus Christ set us free to be his slaves. What a joy! As New Creations, we do what is pleasing to our God, not simply because we have to... not to earn God's favor... we do this because we love Jesus and want to thank him for all that he has done for us.

Paul's instructions to the Galatian Christians are for you and me as well. We are free from the bondage of sin, death, and the devil. Jesus set us free from the wrath of God. Jesus set us free to serve one another in love. Let us keep this in mind. A temptation that many of us experience is to take this as freedom to sin. Maybe you would never say it, but inwardly you view yourself as free to do whatever makes you happy. Thinking, "It's no big deal... I'm free to do what I want... be what I want." Have you had such intentions? I have... but it isn't "no big deal." It is sin. Using God's grace as an excuse to sin? How grotesque! If you have failed in this way... If you have used your Christian freedom as an excuse to sin, repent. Also, listen. Listen to what it is that Jesus has done for you. You see, Jesus took that sin. Jesus took all of your sins. Jesus took all the sins of all people of all time upon his shoulders. And, Jesus bore those sins upon the cross. In Christ, all your sins are forgiven. Even that sin of abusing your freedom. Jesus set you free. He has set you free, so go live. Go live for other people. Live in the freedom of Christ.

Today on Independence Day, contemplating how we live in freedom is good. We consider how we operate in political freedom with our Christian freedom. In this nation, we have been given many blessings. We have the freedom to gather for worship. We have the freedom to vote for government officials. We have the freedom to send our kids to school. In this political freedom, as you are faced with choices... as you have decisions to make... "*use your freedom to serve one another in love.*" Now, I cannot tell how exactly that will look... honestly, these decisions will look different for different people... but "*use your freedom to serve one another in love.*" Teens and Young adults, you have the freedom in this country to choose a career. As one who is free in Christ, use your political freedom to choose a career not to just make yourself happy, but to serve others in love. If you work for Starbucks, serve others in love when you make those Mocha Lattes. If you process loans, serve others in love when you calculate the numbers. All of us, in the freedom of Christ, are set free to serve. Let us consider this. We will do this because Jesus set us free. Now, in the Spirit, we want to follow our God's will.

The Declaration of Independence says that liberty and the pursuit of Happiness are two of our unalienable rights. As Christians, we know that in freedom, we do not always choose what makes us happy. Instead, because we have been set free by Jesus, we are free to serve others in love. Amen.