

Sermon

“Life by the Spirit”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Luke 9:51 When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him. On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; 53 but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 When his disciples James and John saw it, they said, “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 Then they went on to another village.

Luke 9:57 As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” 58 And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” 59 To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” 60 But Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61 Another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” 62 Jesus said to him, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

Gal. 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Gal. 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. 14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

Gal. 5:16 Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 21 envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Gal. 5:22 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

- I. We will be observing a national holiday later this week**
 - A. Thursday is, of course, a day when we celebrate our “Independence” as a nation.**
 - B. We, no doubt, will recount the decision to choose independence from what we remember as the tyrannical oversight of a distant empire . . .**
 - C. And our decision to live into a new freedom**
 - 1. Freedom to pursue religion (or not) as we please . . .**
 - 2. Freedom to peaceably assemble a petition the government about grievances . . .**
 - D. If we choose to — we will go to hear speeches about how “Freedom isn’t free” and how our various freedoms have been secured for us through the**

- sacrifice of many people and much blood-letting.
- E. The word “freedom” will be at the center of many fourth of July celebrations.
- II. It seems providential that we are given Galatians 5:1-ff
- A. Paul writing a letter that at times becomes terse
1. To a church community he founded
 2. And he feels should understand the gospel better
- B. In today’s passage he too is focussed on “freedom.”
1. Freedom both *from* and *for*.
- C. Freedom *from* the demands of the old Law - in this case the issue of whether men should be circumcised before becoming a Christian ...
- D. Freedom *for* a life which is energized and guided by the Holy Spirit.
- E. But, following in the pattern of Jesus, Paul understands freedom *not* as freedom from responsibility for oneself and others.
1. This is *not* the sort of freedom which claims
 - a. I have no responsibility for others
 - b. I can do whatever I please
 - c. I can live in whatever kind of self-indulgent luxury I like — even as my rapacious consumerism is poisoning the planet and injuring my neighbor.
- III. The Apostle Follows Jesus in pointing to a different kind of *freedom*.
- A. It is a freedom which ironically looks like

“slavery.”

Gal. 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.

B. Paul is simply reminding the church of the teaching of Christ:

Mark 10:41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve,

C. Paul argues that when we remain enslaved to the values and impulses of a world which teaches us to:

1. Bite and devour one another — we get one set of outcomes:

- a. fornication**
- b. impurity**
- c. licentiousness**
- d. idolatry**
- e. sorcery**
- f. enmities**
- g. strife**
- h. jealousy**
- i. anger**
- j. quarrels**
- k. dissensions**
- l. factions**
- m. envy**
- n. drunkenness**

- o. carousing
- p. and things like these. (whew!)
- D. Our freedom is *not* the freedom to do as we please.

IV. Our freedom is the freedom to “love [our] neighbor as we ourselves!”

A. Paul has argued along the same lines in his letter to Rome:

Rom. 13:8 Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

B. Our freedom is to live life by the Spirit:

C. That Spirit-driven life plays out in concrete ways:

1. the fruit of the Spirit is love
2. joy (there are too few *joyful* Christians!)
3. peace (being at peace with oneself & with others)

Rom 12:18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

4. patience

Col. 1:11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, (the virtue of Fortitude - PHL)

5. kindness

*Acts 28:2 The natives showed us unusual **kindness**. In Greek “philanthropy” From *Phileo* and *anthropos* “Care/love for humankind”*

6. generosity — Our growth as disciples can be understood as a movement

- a. from calculating hard-heartedness ==>
- b. to compassionate generosity.

7. faithfulness — fidelity. Volumes could (and probably *should*) be said about this word

alone. Where has faithfulness gone?

- a. Being faithful to one another as:**
 - i. Colleagues at work**
 - ii. Friends**
 - iii. to our spouse & children**
 - iv. faithful to God by taking our faith seriously enough to let it transform us...**
 - v. fidelity to care for the poor, the dislocated, the marginal, the foreigner in our midst**

The Bible is *insistent* in its calling for us to be faithful to one another in these ways.

8. gentleness — I think you know that I have been pondering “gentleness” for over a year now.

- a. There is, perhaps, no other more reliable indicator of our depth of faith and the seriousness of our discipleship than whether we have learned from our Lord to be *gentle*.**

Matt. 11:29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

9. & self-control. — Self control requires discipline. Our freedom in faith is to live with and in discipline.

- a. to daily keep God ever before us**
- b. to daily examine our life for clues to what God desires for and from us.**
- c. to rid ourselves of the sin which keeps us**

devouring one another

c. to live in and by the Spirit of God.

25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

V. The freedom of our faith is a freedom to be with and for others

A. It is not an escape from entanglements with others

B. Rather it is a freedom to remain *in relationship* with others in a way that cultivates deeper meaning and greater compassion for our neighbors.

14 For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

C. Christ - who could have remained in isolation “for us and for our redemption - came down”

D. It is in the nature of God to not be free from us — but rather to stay in the complicated, messy, and ultimately *meaningful* relationship with God’s creatures.

E. “For freedom Christ has set us free”

F. So this week, each time we encounter the word “freedom” we might ask what is meant by that.

1. Is it a self-indulgent kind of liberty?

2. Or is it freedom to be servants to one another, and (indeed) to all who are in need?

G. If we will embrace this neighborly freedom which sees their good as our own good —

1. God will be glorified and

2. we will begin to see our own relationship with God and one another transforming into

something beautiful and faithful.