

Pentecost 3C June 26, 2022 Proper 8  
St. Paul Lutheran Church, York

I Kings 19:9b-21  
Galatians 5:1; 13-25  
Luke 9:51-62

“For freedom Christ has set us free.” Hooray! Yea! I like this advice from St. Paul! “For freedom Christ has set us free!” So, does that mean I can do whatever I want? For example, if I so choose, I can sleep in on Sunday morning instead of going to Worship with the community of believers? Does it mean I can do as I please? That there are no demands on me, no responsibilities? I’m free, free, free!!!

St. Paul continues: “Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Yes! I like this!

“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.” Oh! Now what is he saying? Isn’t he contradicting himself? Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence!

There is an old nursery rhyme that goes: “There once were two cats of Kilkenny; each thought there was one cat too many; so they fought and they fit, they scratched and they bit; til, excepting their nails and the tips of their tails, instead of two cats, there weren’t any.”

The freedom to which Christ calls us is not the freedom of self-indulgence. It is not a ‘me first’ type of freedom. It is not ‘my way or the highway’ type of freedom. That kind of freedom is indeed really bondage and it leads to death – as it did for the cats of Kilkenny. That kind of freedom destroys community. It leads us to bite and devour one another. It destroys the very core of our being – for we have been created by a Triune God to live in community – with God and with one another and we have been created in love to live in love – in the love of God and of one another. We have been created to live in love that looks always outward. Love that seeks the good of the other. Love that leads to the praise and worship of the Creator and to care and concern for one another, for creation. The bondage from which we have been set free is bondage to self, bondage to the ‘me first’ way of living, bondage from self-indulgent ways which are oblivious to the common good. We have been set free in Christ from the relentless pursuit of our own wills and desires in which we have no moral commitment to others – a pursuit that soon becomes inhumane and self-destructive – in which, to paraphrase the nursery rhyme – instead of two humans, with me at the top, there aren’t any!

That ancient tempter, the devil, twists and turns the freedom for which God created us. He turns our attention inward, to ourselves. He makes it seem so good for us, so right for us to follow self-indulgent ways. Satan calls such selfishness freedom and we, foolish and self-centered as we are, believe him. Satan beguiles us to think: “After all, if I don’t look out for myself, who will?” Or, “I’ve worked hard for what I have. I deserve to use it as I wish,” and so on. But this so-called freedom leads only to envy, strife, jealousy, quarreling, and the like as our wills clash with one another. We use one another for our own purposes. Often we do not even realize that is what we are doing.

The Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, gives us another definition for freedom: Love. The self-giving love of the Father who sent his only begotten Son for the sake of the world, for our sake and our neighbor’s. The self-giving love of the Son who, in obedience to the Father, gave his life for the sake of

the world, for our sake and our neighbor's. The self-giving love of the God who never stops seeking the good of this creation which he has made and who never stops loving a humanity captive to love of self. The self-giving love of God given to us freely through the Spirit so that we might turn from our self-indulgent ways which lead to death and destruction and be turned free of self-love to love for God and for one another.

Living in such love is not easy. Living in such love means daily dying to self – crucifying the flesh as St. Paul describes it. Death is never easy. But this death is not the last word for our lives. Dying with Christ, we are also raised with Christ to new life. Dying daily to sin and self-centeredness we are raised daily to live in Christ. We are raised each day to live in the blessedness and true freedom bestowed on us by the Spirit. What a joy! What a blessedness! What true freedom! The fruits of our sinful, inward directed lives are spoiled fruits – idolatry, strife, anger, envy, quarreling – and they lead to the destruction of community and to death. The fruits of our new life in Christ are the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. These are the gifts that build up community, that build up the Body of Christ. These are fruits which nourish us and sustain abundant life – life we were created to live.

These are the gifts given by the Spirit:

Love – love that flows to us from the very heart of the Triune God

Joy – joy that sees the rainbow through the rain and knows the promise is not vain, that morn shall tearless be

Peace – peace that passes all understanding. Peace that quiets fear and anxiety

Patience, Kindness, Gentleness, self-control

Generosity – as we who have freely received freely give of ourselves, our time, our resource

Faithfulness – for our God is faithful and keeps his promises and fulfills his Word. Through the Spirit we too learn to be faithful to the covenant God made with us at our baptism into Christ.

Here in these gifts we find reason to invite others to come and join us. To come and find the freedom that comes living in the Spirit of Christ. Here we find the life God offers freely to God's people.

What a wondrous life it is! Praise and thanks be to the God from whom it flows! Praise and thanks be to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all ages!