

#33 15-16

Psalms 16

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21

Luke 9:51-62

Galatians 5:1, 13-25

The Freedom of Following Christ

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. 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. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 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. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, 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. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

Freedom! This word means so much to so many for such different reasons! I am always reminded me of an emotional song written by Marius Müller-Westernhagen, a West German actor and part-time pop star who wrote a song called "Freiheit" (Freedom) 3 years before the fall of the wall, and yet it rose to popularity and came to be associated with the feelings of the former East Germany after the fall of the wall. Because it was a gentle, moving, ballad where the refrain was simply, "Freedom, Freedom, it is the only thing that counts." And those who had been living in the East, who could not travel to certain parts of the world freely, resonated with the warm truth that life in this moment, to be fully enjoyed, needs to be lived with a sense of "unlimitedness".

We in this country can relate to the cries for freedom. And not only because of our celebration which we commemorate on our upcoming 4th of July - our liberty from the oppression of the British rule. But the civil rights movement also called for us as a nation to provide freedom for those people of color to have equal treatment - not separate - unity of justice for all, the freedom to be human without any reservations in accordance to skin color.

The same sense of justice and equality of rights - the freedom to live as others live - came when same sex couples got the right to marry and all the benefits of the legalities of heterosexual couples were given to homosexual couples. The joy - the feels - of Freiheit! Freedom! Freedom! It is the only thing that counts!

It is the love of the sacred freedom which is spelled out here as based on "the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." THAT freedom is what makes you go into a state of overwhelming awe. And when that freedom was long hard fought for and suffered for, as what Christ did, as what the Freedom Riders did in the 60's, as what the gay rights community had been doing for decades, as what the East Germans did, and you stand at the end of the experience in that win - that freedom - THAT MAY BE ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND SACRED FEELINGS THAT LIFE CAN OFFER ANY HUMAN.

And our scripture is talking about offering this "freedom" feeling from systematic oppression to everyone, any day, anytime, through a religious experience.

Now, I, as a white, heterosexual, protestant may not have an enormous sense of oppression as many people in our society have. There is still some sense of it by being a female, but really, when some African American Mothers have to worry about their son's taking the car out for a drive, I realize that I am in a position of privilege. So, why should my soul cry out for freedom?

Deep inside every soul is a sense of who we are. We know that. And around our sense of true self, are those aspects of personality which influence and sort of decorate our true selves. Like our nationality, family, socio-economic status, our political points of view - those kind of additions which influence who we think we are, but aren't really our core souls. And those external things surrounding and influencing our true selves can flux and change and be adapted with time. But our core true selves, never change - they are the bits of God in each of us.

And we can build that core up - we can make that true self grow bigger and stronger and we can lessen the false selves that surround us, make those influences less powerful, and focus on creating our lives as Godly as we can. And THAT is what faith and spirituality is all about. Creating in us kinder, wiser, compassionate, loving beings again, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." Because this is growth of our souls in God.

The false sense of freedom comes when we try to make our false selves bigger - those additions that swarm around our true selves. When we focus on THOSE is when we are in danger of building up what Paul calls "the works of the flesh." "Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these." These things are done with very little thought or control - sometimes habits - sometimes influenced by our families - sometime stuff that we just thought might be fun, or make us part of the in-crowd.

But the point of this whole comparison is that we are being asked throughout our lives, non-stop, to be seeking to live, and to create, and to grow our own true selves the freedom of God - free from what fears we have developed over the years, free from what prejudices we have adopted from our life experiences, free from our past, our present, free to live and grow in God, and trust in the hope that comes from the Holy Spirit!

Let us look for a moment at the Gospel. How many of us would be willing to live the vagabond life that Jesus was apparently offering? Jesus was determined, he knew where he was going and what he wanted to achieve, he was offering people a freedom of life to be instruments of God - to be free of obligations - and our human tendency is to want the comfort of a home, the comfort of our prejudices and what wisdom we have now. We grow tired of having to learn something new.

And yet there is a sense of freedom when we find ourselves mastering a new thought, a new device . . . how many of us got our cell phone and started out with a sense of impending doom? But slowly but sure we figured out how to use them, and with that accomplishment we got a little bit of a swagger in our sense of self? KWIM?

How many here remember when we, at the very least, worried about interracial couples, if not just plan thought there was something wrong with that? And we got ourselves around to the place where not only is it OK, but we do not think twice about it! THAT is evidence of growth in God being! And now, we can catch ourselves earlier and earlier . . . what was once thought to be wrong, is perfectly fine, and therefore maybe some of our other thoughts may require adjustments to fulfill the love and kindness requirement!

Our spiritual lives have no homes - our spiritual lives need to never feel like they can settle down and find a hole to sleep in - our spiritual lives must always be ready to adapt with the Holy Spirit of Christ into greater and greater understanding and acceptance. We do not have to time to waste on this planet! We need as many people out in this world daring to break the social barriers which separate our God pieces from one another! We need to continue to plow forward for the love of God and for the love and acceptance of each other!

This world need to look at the planet from the heavens and see that from there, there are no borders! We get down here and it is us puny humans who have created the line which separates Montgomery county from Frederick county, Maryland from Delaware, the US from Canada . . .

Christ saw only God's creation - with an unlimited ability to love. And his life was dedicated to breaking every boundary - even death - that we may have created on this earth! Let there be peace on earth - and let it begin with ME! And you , and us, and everyone . . . Now and forevermore! AMEN!