

Pentecost 5, 2010  
Good Hope Lutheran Church  
Galatians 5: 13 – 15

The sermon text today is the second lesson, taken from Galatians, chapter 5, and in particular that first big paragraph, starting at v. 13. I invite you to keep the text handy, and to read it over a time or two as we proceed.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:  
Lord Jesus, we thank you for this land in which we live, and for the freedoms we enjoy; we pray your blessings upon our country. Even more, we thank you Lord for your death and resurrection, by which we are freed from the power of sin and death. Let it not be that we use our freedom as an excuse for sin, but instead as an opportunity to love others, the way you first loved us. Lord Jesus in your name we pray, AMEN.

Do you suppose there's a passage in the Bible, that speaks more directly to life in America today, than Galatians 5:13? I mean it seems to fit our situation so well I almost have to wonder, did God put it in Scripture just for us? "Brothers and sisters!" it says. "You have been called to freedom! But be careful, lest your freedom become an excuse, for self-indulgence."

We are exactly one week away from the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and our annual celebration of American independence, and freedom. We relish our freedom in this country, and are proud of it—and rightly so, it seems to me, our liberty is unparalleled in the history of the world and not something any of us would want to trade, for anything. We are in every respect the freest people ever in the whole entire world—but what has come of our freedom?

This great blessing of liberty—what have we done with it? Well, many things that are worthy and good, obviously; but look around, and what do you see out there? Look around, what do you see in your own life, what do you see in your own heart and in your own soul, is it just me? Or does it seem that “freedom” is fast becoming a polite, convenient way for us to excuse behavior that is selfish and self-centered. Is it just me, or has freedom become a nice, pretty word we use to cover up habits that are ugly, and petty, and small—“I’m free!” Meaning what, I can be as rude and obnoxious as I want to be, and no one can tell me any different? “I’m free,” meaning, I can do anything I want anytime I want, never mind how it affects you or anybody else? “I’m free,” meaning what, I can be greedy, apathetic, lazy; unconcerned about the greater good and focused entirely on myself and my own gratification and that’s not a problem, oh no—it’s a lifestyle choice, that’s what. I don’t know, it just seems to me, that when our forefathers fought and died for the cause of freedom, the word meant more to them than simply a lifestyle choice. There was a privilege and an opportunity that went with freedom, there was even a burden of responsibility. Certainly that’s part of what *the Bible* means, by freedom—and I just don’t see as much of that anymore. I see instead what the Scripture warns of—freedom being used as a cover for self indulgence, freedom being used as an excuse for selfishness,

leading inevitably to a world where people bite and devour and consume one another, every night on the evening news.

These few verses in Scripture seem to have been written just for us today—but they weren't of course. They are for others too. St Paul was speaking originally to the Galatians, a people living comfortably and at ease, safely within the confines of the Roman Empire; a people who were leading a relatively care free life, and who had just learned the Good News of the risen Jesus Christ and so were no longer afraid of death. The Galatians were a people who had heard that their sins were forgiven, and who now believed they had a place in heaven someday, and who suddenly felt more free than they ever had before in their lives! And they were a people who very quickly learned to *use* their freedom, to cover up all kinds of greed, and lust, and laziness, look, said the Galatians. What difference does it make if I sin? I can sin if I want to, what difference does it make, Jesus died to forgive me, right? So I don't have to worry about what I do, I'm free from all that now. Matter of fact, how dare you even call it sin—those are the old rules, and because of Jesus I'm free from them too, aren't I? The Galatians would have fit in well in America—or we would have fit in well in Galatia, one or the other.

But Paul would have none of it. The way you are using your freedom? The

way you are using your freedom is in fact a fast, easy way, to fall into a new and deeper kind of slavery. To be a servant only of your own appetites. To be controlled by your own habits, to be dominated by your own worst instincts, to serve only yourself—that's freedom? Really? No, that is *not* freedom, said Paul. That is instead your old slavery to sin and death, back again and masquerading under a new name, and it's a slavery made worse this time by the fact—you don't seem to "get" it. You just don't seem to see, how enslaved by sin you've become.

Listen, said Paul. Here's what freedom really is. To be free is to live your life under the control of Jesus Christ. To be free is to let Jesus be the boss! That's what it means by the way when we call Jesus "Lord"—He's the boss! The *Lord* Jesus Christ is the very Son of God, who did indeed die on the cross to forgive you your sins, and who did indeed rise from the dead to save you. But more. Jesus died and rose again to give you a whole new kind of life, starting today. A new kind of life in which He is the boss—not your appetites, not your habits, not your emotions or your grudges or anything about you. They're not boss. He is. And freed by Him from your fear of death. Freed by Him from guilt and remorse. Freed by Him from habits, emotions, addictions, grudges and all your own worst impulses—you are able at last, to love somebody other than yourself. You are free to love God,

and live the life God meant for you to live; you are free indeed.

The great paradox uncovered by the letter to the Galatians, the great paradox I want you to see in your own life—the paradox is, you are not free, till you admit Jesus is the boss. Until He's the boss, you're still a slave of something—greed anger resentment; habits pride addiction; public opinion, you name it—you're still a slave of something, but when He's the boss. That's all gone. And freedom *then* is no longer an excuse for you to do your worst, true freedom is a chance for Him to be at His best, working in you, working through you, for the good of all, unto life everlasting. May it be so for all of us today, in the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.