



Grace Lutheran Church
July 3, 2022: 4th Sunday after Pentecost
“A Christian Charter of Freedom” [Galatians 6:1-16](#)

Paul’s letter to the Galatians has been called “the charter of Christian freedom.” It is no coincidence that it comes to us as our second reading on this Independence Day weekend.

What then if we could hear it in terms that might resonate for fans of American of history and this holiday in particular? I decided to give it a try:

“When in the course of the divine events it becomes necessary for followers of Jesus Christ to dissolve bondage to earthly laws instituted only for human purposes of material gain, and to embrace the law of love that guides the entire created order, a decent respect for the truth of new life in Christ requires that we declare the terms that separate us from the powers of darkness.

“To that end, I, Paul, hold these truths to be self-evident:

- “While the law is useful in revealing our sin, no one is justified by observing the law but only by faith in Jesus Christ.
- “To be justified in Christ while we are sinners absolutely does not mean that Christ promotes sin.
- “On the contrary! For through the law, we die to the law, so that we may live in Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives within me.
- “Those who know God and are known by God have, by definition, turned away from slavery to sin. We have been set free from this slavery by the cross of Christ.
- “This freedom has been given to us that we may serve one another in love and lavishly share the fruit of the spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.
- “Furthermore, this freedom sets us free to carry one another’s burdens. We do not grow weary because at the proper time we will reap a good harvest if we do not give up.
- “The laws given by God through Moses do not apply to Gentiles, that is, to Christians of a non-Jewish background. Circumcision in particular has no bearing on salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. All that matters is that you are a new creation in Christ.

Signed, Paul.”

Galatians is thought to be the earliest of all the New Testament writings, addressed by Paul in 49 AD to churches in the southern Roman province of Galatia -- Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, where trouble was afoot. These young churches were being ripped apart by zealous Jewish Christians who were refusing to admit Gentile, or non-Jewish, converts into membership unless they were circumcised, as was required for Jews under laws handed down by God through Moses, which

they argued were binding for all time and could never be set aside by human beings no matter what.

But there was a “what” and that of course was Jesus Christ.

Paul is trying to get people at these churches to grasp that the law of love, the great commandment to love others as Christ loves us, supersedes all previous regulations of faith. You can feel the temperature rising as he lays into his argument: In the gospel that he, Paul, received from Jesus himself, faith alone in Christ is all that is necessary to be made right with God. The law was our disciplinarian, he writes, but only until Jesus. “Now that faith has come,” he says, “we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” (3:25-26)

He begins to verge on desperation as the letter goes along. At one point he cries out, “I am afraid that all my work for you may have been wasted!” Once the Galatians were so loyal to him that “had it been possible you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.” But now, he laments, “have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?”

In this this “charter of freedom” that is Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the first five chapters tell us freedom *from* what—from having to prove ourselves worthy in God’s sight by whatever we might do or not do. Faith alone does all that. Today in Chapter 6 we find out: Freedom *for* what?

To engage with the world as a new person in Christ. To be willing to shoulder the burdens of discipleship by carrying our own load. To be willing to reap what we sow. To not growing weary in responding to what we hear ourselves being called to do. And by the way, reaping what you sow does not mean being punished for doing bad things, because God never does that, but rather that if we work the ground well we will gain a good harvest.

Then right in the middle of Chapter 6 a bizarre thing happens. Typically all correspondence was penned by a scribe, who took dictation. Here, though, Paul suddenly grabs the pen right out of the scribe’s hand. He is so eager to make his point that he finds himself compelled do the writing himself, in the equivalent of our all caps. “See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand!” – you can almost hear that he is just about at the end of his rope.

HEAR HIM, THEN: We are freed FROM the fear that divides us from our fellow human beings, and we are freed FOR loving others, all persons equally, with the same love that flows to us and to all people equally from God’s heart.

But not just in words but in actions, things we do that flow naturally out of the heart of faith. And not just doing a nice thing for someone, but living in a radically different way that embodies the Christ who now lives in us. For example, as new creations in Christ we are especially compelled to set right historic injustices. We *must* take special care to lift up those whose fullness of life has been compromised by oppression, persecution, slander, misrepresentation, stereotyping,

prejudice, or in any way by the denial of the same inalienable rights that are promised to us in our own Declaration of Independence.

For Paul, though, this is not a manual on individual behavior. He is prescribing a way of life for the church as a whole, how groups of people can be in right relationship with one another and thereby with the totality of creation. "I have been crucified to the cosmos," he writes, referring to the old self that has been put to death forever.

"I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning," Jesus says to the seventy disciples who have just returned triumphantly from their first foray into discipleship. Each time we step out into the world boldly in love, Satan falls again. Each time it takes a little more out of him. If we do not grow weary in doing good, at some point Satan simply will simply not be able to get up again.

Amen.