

Freed for Loving

June 26, 2016

Galatians 5:1, 13-26

In May 1924, a shocked nation learned two young men from Chicago, Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, had killed 14-year-old Bobbie Franks.

What made the crime so shocking, and made Leopold and Loeb household names, was the reason for the killing. The two became obsessed with the idea of committing the "perfect murder." They took on this project as a demonstration of their perceived intellectual superiority.

They believed their gifts and status rendered them capable of carrying out a "perfect crime" and absolved them of responsibility for their actions. So they picked young Franks at random as their victim.

The murder was as blatant a misuse of human freedom as could be imagined. It was the result of taking freedom and turning it into what Paul would have called an opportunity for self-indulgence. It was the worst kind of bondage masquerading as superior human freedom.

As we move on our civil calendar from Flag Day to Independence Day, we have an opportunity to think about the nature of freedom. So it is timely that we have Paul's words today on Christian freedom.

As you may recall, we are spending time in Paul's letter to the Galatians in June and July. So let me review where Paul has taken us so far in the letter. We are baptized and beloved children of God and followers of Jesus. We dare not take that for granted. Paul was called through God's grace. The Galatian Christians were called through God's grace. So are we. We respond to that grace with the faith best described as trust. Our relationship with Jesus and his Church is all about that faith.

That faith results in Christian freedom. **Christian freedom is loving service.** That's the main point today. **Christian freedom is loving service.**

In Galatians five, verse six, Paul summarizes his argument so far and creates a launching pad for his conclusions. "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything,*" he declares, "*the only thing that counts is faith working through love.*"

Martin Luther once wrote, "Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible."

Christian freedom is loving service.

Christian freedom is responsible. "*For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence...*"

You may recall that Leopold and Loeb were sentenced to life imprisonment. Richard Loeb was killed in a prison brawl in 1936. Nathan Leopold was paroled in 1958. At his parole, he claimed that he wanted "a chance to find redemption for myself and to help others." Nathan Leopold became a hospital technician after his release. He died in 1971. Perhaps he died knowing something more about real freedom after all those years in prison.

Christian freedom is loving service.

Christian freedom is for the sake of others. *"For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"* Martin Luther described this as becoming "Christ to the other." In his great treatise called *On Christian Liberty*, he wrote these words. "Each one should become as it were a Christ to the other that we may be Christs to one another and Christ may be the same in all, that is, that we may be truly Christians."

Christian freedom is loving service.

Christian freedom is a gift of the Holy Spirit. *"If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."*

Notice that the Holy Spirit produces "fruit." This is contrasted with the "works" that come from our selfishness. Fruit grows from a seed. Paul describes that seed in Romans five, verse five. That seed is *"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."* That seed was planted when we were baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection.

Now Paul can talk about the fruit from that seed: *"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."* Maybe at some point I'll do a series of sermons on that fruit. But for now please notice that this fruit is evidence that we are using our Christian freedom in the right way. This fruit is a clue that we are being led by the Holy Spirit. Paul assures us, perhaps with a small smile on his face, that *"there is no law against such things."*

Christian freedom is loving service.

Let me close with a wonderful prayer by the Reverend Peter Marshall, long-time chaplain of the United States Senate. It is a wonderful combination of Christian liberty and political freedom. It is a prayer for our time.

"Lord Jesus, thou who art the way, the truth, and the life; hear us as we pray for the truth that shall make all free. Teach us that liberty is not only to be loved but also to be lived. Liberty is too precious a thing to be buried in books. It costs too much to be hoarded. Help us see that our liberty is not the right to do as we please, but the opportunity to please to do what is right." Amen.

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