

**Grace, mercy, and peace are yours in abundance. Amen.**

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. <sup>2</sup> **Mark my words!** I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup> You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. <sup>5</sup> But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. <sup>6</sup> For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. **The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** This is God's Word for our meditation.

**Dear Friends,**

Every two years we have a "free" garage sale. We want to reflect what Paul is talking about in this portion of scripture that our salvation is free and so we have this free garage sale to share Christ's love that is in our hearts. And yet, that is a concept people have a hard time understanding. I had one man ask me, "What do you mean free?" I had to explain to him that it meant exactly what it said – he could check out the items we had and anything he wanted or needed he could have without cost. He couldn't believe it. And then we had some people who wanted to give us a donation – they just felt they had to contribute something and yet that took away from the idea that thus was all free.

Just like our salvation, someone had to pay the cost for the items we were offering but also like our salvation, we receive those items for free because of the love of Christ that has come to us and the love of Christ we want to reflect in all that we do.

So today, as we celebrate the Lutheran Reformation, we want to rejoice that Our salvation is free and brings us freedom from our sins. As we consider Paul's Words, let's do so under the theme, **"Enjoy your Freedom in Christ,"** because this is **"A Freedom from the Slavery of Works"** and it is **"A Freedom to Joyfully Serve the Lord."**

**I.** At the time Paul wrote this letter, the church was being attacked by a group who were insisting that the people had to follow the Old Testament Laws given to Moses on Mount Sinai to be saved. The one part of the Law they were insisting on was that all the males be circumcised. Paul had spent a portion of this letter pointing out that Christ kept all the Old Testament laws perfectly for us so that we are no longer bound by them, however, Paul said, **"If you insist on keeping the Law, you must keep the whole law to be saved."** What an impossible task!

To keep the whole Law of God! What if I miss one little thing that I don't even know about or what if I am going along, doing pretty good and then I blow it. The Bible tells me that, **"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."** (James 2:10). If I want to follow this path, when I fail that just adds to my burden. It weighs down that heavy yoke of sin I must carry. That is the burden of guilt that comes with trying to do enough; trying to be good enough to gain my own salvation; trying to do it all myself.

Trying to gain heaven by my own works also rejects everything Christ did for me. Paul points that out in verse 2, **“Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.”** If you start down the path where you think that what you do counts towards your salvation, then what good is Christ? Then we are saying he didn't do enough. We are ignoring his resurrection which was God the Father's stamp of approval that he has done enough. That He has paid the complete price for the sins of the world – for your sins and for mine. The resurrection assures us that our salvation is complete in everything Christ has done.

Yet, our pride often prompts us to say, “I can do it myself – just tell me what I have to do and let me at it!” Trying to justify ourselves by keeping the Law goes right along with that opinion, but Paul tells us, **“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”** Trying to save ourselves by keeping the Law alienates us from Christ. It not only separates us from Christ but it pits us against him and his love. How do you want to be judged? Do you want to face God's judgment based on what you have done or based on what Jesus has done in your place and for you? I know I would rather stand before God's judgment seat resting my hope on what Christ has done for me.

I know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did everything perfectly to pay my debt for sin. He kept the Law perfectly and was the all-sufficient sacrifice for my failures. His righteousness frees me from the slavery of sin through the faith the Holy Spirit has planted in my heart. The price of our freedom was high – the precious blood of our Savior – and yet Jesus gave it willingly for each and every one of us. **“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not by works, so that no man may boast.”** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

1500 years after Paul wrote this letter there were still people attacking the Church by insisting we have to keep the Law to be saved. This false teaching was a heavy burden for Martin Luther. He couldn't get rid of his guilt. No matter how many good works and prayers and penance he did, he always worried whether he had done enough and in the back of his mind knew he had fallen short.

Because God's Law was always in front of him and the focus of his life, he wasn't able to see God's love proclaimed in scriptures. It wasn't until the Holy Spirit opened his eyes through faith that he was able to see the love of Jesus. Then he realized the Law couldn't save. Only faith in Christ could bring him the relief he sought.

All of a sudden he was happy – Christ had set him free from the guilt of his sin. Christ had taken Luther's burden of guilt and cast it away from him by bringing him forgiveness. God does the very same thing for us. He frees us from the slavery of our sins by forgiving them. That forgiveness doesn't come through the Law but rather through the Gospel – the good news that Jesus did what we can't – he fulfilled God's requirements for our sins.

The Apostle Paul points out that Christ set us free from sin with a purpose in mind. He set us free so that we could joyfully praise him and serve him. That's what Luther did. He shared God's Word at every opportunity and devoted his life to service to his Lord. God's Word not only brought him forgiveness but also guided him in living his life for God. So it is for us. Not that we

be a full time called worker in the church but that we be a full time Christian – living our life for our God and giving all glory to him in all that we do.

## II. **“But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.”**

The Christian, by faith, eagerly looks forward to the “Righteousness for which we hope.” That is the focus of our lives – we might call it the Christian’s treasure because of its great value. That treasure starts with freedom from our sins which also means freedom from the guilt that comes along with sin. It includes salvation through faith alone in Jesus alone as our Savior. That faith guarantees us eternal life in heaven with our Savior. It includes the freedom to praise and serve our Lord and Savior. Our Lord doesn’t ask us to serve without giving us some training.

That’s what Garrett, our confirmand, has been doing for the last two years – being trained in what God’s Word says. This morning he will publicly profess his faith in Jesus and his desire to join with us as a communicant member – prepared to receive the Lord’s Supper. But his training doesn’t end with Confirmation – it continues throughout his life as he reads God’s Word and attends Bible Class and is strengthened in his faith through the Lord’s Supper.

The Holy Spirit prepares us to serve through Word and sacrament. God’s Word gives us all we need to know to serve our Lord and the Holy Spirit works through the Word and sacrament to encourage us and strengthen our faith. After justification, being brought to faith and coming to know Jesus as our Savior, sanctification, or living our lives for our Savior is the next most important thing.

That is why Paul said, **“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** As we let our faith express itself in love, we always want to remember that it is faith alone that saves, but faith is never alone. Peter said, **“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”** (Acts 4:20). He had to tell others about Christ. That was his faith expressing itself in love.

Sometimes we get so caught up in supporting the institution of the church that we forget to support the mission of the church – the mission is to make disciples. Jesus gave us that mission just before he ascended into heaven. The way we make disciples is to tell them about Jesus. That is faith expressing itself in love. Whether you realize it or not, each one of you has the tools to do that right now – to make disciples.

You know more of God’s Word than you probably realize. You know that we are all sinful **“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.”** You know that **“The wages of sin is death.”** You know that Jesus paid for the sins of the world on the cross. How **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** (2 Co. 5:21). You don’t have to be able to recite the Bible word-for-word, just convey what it says in your own words. You don’t have to be a pastor to do that. God will work through you and sometimes even gives you the right words as you talk to others.

That is our purpose in being here. To share the Good News of salvation. It begins at home with our children and grandchildren. To pass this good news onto the next generation. It continues in our back yard with our neighbors and friends. Even at work we can be a witness of

Christ's love for us. Sometimes rules at work make it impossible to speak the good news but our actions at times speak louder than words.

There are many people longing for the freedom from sin that God has given you and me. We rejoice in the freedom from sin that we have. Now, joyfully serve your Lord by sharing the message of freedom found in God's Word. Let people know that there is something in this world that is truly free – the free gift of salvation that brings freedom from sin. Amen.