June 30, 2019

Sermon

Galatians 5: 1, 13-25

“It’s Second Nature”

Gentle God, May the words that I share be pleasing to you and may theses words draw each of us closer to you.

Growing up I only had one brother, he was 5 years older than I was. It worked out well for me because he was the one who always got in trouble and did crazy things...so by the time I was a teenager my parents were exhausted and enjoyed my angelic behavior>>>.well, I wanted them to think was angelic behavior and compared to my brother it probably seemed that way to them as well. I was 11 years old when my brother got his driver's license. Most of us can relate to that new found sense of freedom of having a driver's license - free to go wherever you want, whenever we want. I’m pretty certain that my brother was not alone in thinking that this new found freedom also meant that he could go as fast as he wanted too. The third day after he got this new found freedom of driving - he backed into another car trying to park the car and in his third week of driving he totaled the car after crashing into a telephone pole. Obviously my brother needed more practice at driving and he probably should have had a lot more practice before he was given the freedom of driving the car alone. My brother abused the freedom he was given and he was fortunate that he didn’t end up paying more of a physical price; only a financial one.

 Freedom - How do we use or abuse the freedom we have been given? The book of Galatians is all about Christian freedom. In the early church, Jewish Christians struggled with a dual identity: their Jewish beliefs required them to be strict followers of the Jewish laws; their newfound faith in Christ invited them to be free from the strict adherence to the law.

After Paul had left Galatia, Jewish extremists moved in and taught the Gentile Chrisitans of Galatia that they had to follow Jewish laws and traditions in addition to believing in Christ. They taught the gentiles that in order to convert to be a follower of Christ they would first need follow the Jewish law of circumcision. Paul did not agree and when he discovered the news he wrote this letter to the Galatian people. Paul believed that the GOOD NEWs was for everyone. For Paul, salvation was by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus and nothing else. To Paul, faith in Christ meant true freedom.

But Paul is quick to say in verse 13 - “But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love.” Paul clearly distinguishes between freedom to sin and freedom to serve.

In the last days of the Civil War, the Confederate capital, Richmond, Virginia, fell to the Union army. Abraham Lincoln insisted on visiting the city. Even though no one knew he was coming, slaves recognized him immediately and crowded around him. He had liberated them by the Emancipation Proclamation, and now Lincoln’s army had set them free. According to Admiral David Porter, an eyewitness, Lincoln spoke to the crowd around him: he said: "Liberty is your birthright.” he went on and warned them not to abuse their freedom saying: "Let the world see that you merit your freedom, don’t let your joy carry you into excesses.”

This is exactly what Paul is saying ...spiritual freedom is our birthright… Paul said “but beware, spiritual freedom isn’t an excuse for disobedience; it forms the basis for learning and obeying God’s laws. It gives us direction in action.”

I was struck by Abraham Lincoln's statement’ “Let the world see that you **merit your freedom**” I think most of us would say that we are Christians. If we claim the title of being a Christian; a follower of Jesus Christ do we “MERIT” that title? ……… Are we, am I…honoring the spiritual freedom I have been given to follow? Would people know I was a Christian if I didn’t wear my cross? Could they tell by the way I talk, or the way I treat other people?

Paul says in our reading today in verses 13-15 - **“*use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*** Paul recognized that with the freedom we have been given to believe, to follow, to serve; also comes the freedom, the option that we won’t believe, won’t follow and won’t serve. He’s saying that it’s not the law that makes us Christian. It’s when we let the Holy Spirit guide our lives in every way that will produce in each of our lives the fruits of the spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These gifts are given to us ...but you know what, we need to be prepared to receive them.

Do you remember the story of Flight 1549 on January 15, 2009; a US Airways airplane took off from LaGuardia Airport in NY City, it’s pilot was Chelsey Sullenberger III, known as "Sully," Soon after the plane took off they flew straight into a flock of Canadian geese. Almost immediately both engines were damaged. Sully and his co-pilot had to make several major decisions quickly if they were to save the lives of the passengers. They quickly decided the best place to land the plane was in the Hudson River. The media presented the skillful and successful landing as a miracle, but pilots and Sully say otherwise. I counted no less than 15 steps, specific actions that had to be taken in order for that safe landing to happen. This was no miracle; people said it was like second nature to Sully, - but the reality is that it was practiced.

When you hear Sully speak about it, he reminds us that he was not born with the ability to fly a plane, let alone the specific skills he exhibited in those three short minutes. He was not born with any of the skills that were required. You have to practice at mastering that sort of skill set in order to have it become “like second nature”. You have to want it, to choose to learn it, to practice doing it over and over again. And then, sometimes, when the moment comes, it happens "as if it's second nature," as it did for Sully that day. Flying the plane when they struck a flock of geese seemed to others to be second nature - but to “Sully” it was years of training and practice that took over. It was SECOND nature to him at that time.. Meaning it was not really natural at all in the first place, but a learned, rehearsed, and practiced action, that over time, Sully was able to make appear to be natural.

It’s the same with living our lives as Christians - we need to practice, to study, to rehearse, and to develop our relationship with Christ so that we can receive the gifts of the spirit that God freely gives to us. Gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we practice, study, strengthen our relationship with God then “loving our neighbor” will be second nature to us and in times of need, we know exactly what to do. If we do this, then, like Paul says, we will know that “in Christ, we are free to live lives of love. We will have the Christian freedom Paul was talking about. Amen