**Galatians 5:1-6** October 30, 2022

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Reformation Festival

*Galatians 5:1 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.*

*2Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. 3Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. 4You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. 5But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. 6For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*

**Reformation: Freedom Restored**

Dear Friends in Christ,

We just sang a hymn. Isn’t that cool? “Well, no, pastor. We do that all the time. I kind of liked that hymn, but it wasn’t exactly ‘cool’.”

Well, it was cool—just the fact that we sang a hymn together! You see, up to the time of the Reformation, the early 1500’s, when Christians came to church they didn’t sing. Really! Way back in 354AD, the Council of Laodicea—yes, there will be a test, so you’d better remember (wink, wink)—that church council outlawed most congregational singing. So, by the time of Martin Luther, for a thousand years already!, when you went to church, you didn’t sing! The priest spoke parts of the service in Latin. He chanted lots more in Latin. A trained cantor or choir chanted and sang a few songs, again in Latin. Meanwhile, you the congregation stood there for the entire church service and sang nothing! Imagine that! On only three days of the year—on the festivals of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost—and only for one hymn on each day, Christians were allowed to sing in the church service. (Kehren, John. “Luther’s Songs Continue to Sing”, pp. 1, 13) There are a couple of you who don’t think much of singing. That’s okay. But most people enjoy singing, and some can hardly imagine worshiping God without singing.

I don’t know if congregational singing was maybe spooking around in some illicit, dark corners of the church at the time of the Reformation, but Martin Luther re-introduced congregational singing into the worship service. He was simply doing as the Apostle Paul had told the early Christian Church: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly… as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”* (Col. 3:16). In the Reformation Christians returned to worshipping as believers a thousand years before Christ had done when they sang psalms. Part of the heritage of the Lutheran Reformation is that we sing songs together in our worship services.

And the first hymn that Martin Luther wrote for congregational singing was the one that we just sang, “Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice” (Kehren, 8).

The hymn is almost a narration of the story of salvation. God sat in heaven, seeing the terrible mess humanity had worked itself into. Adam and Eve were created to have the good life, but they (and we) worked ourselves into slavery to death, to sin, to Satan, to hell, and all their sorrow. In divine pity, the Second person of the Trinity flashed into human history to set us free.

Singing that story, we sang, “*He spoke to his beloved Son: ‘It’s time to have compassion. Then go, bright Jewel of my crown, and bring to all salvation. From sin and sorrow set them free…*” (CW 557:5) “Set them free!” just as the Word of God spoke in the first verse of our reading, ***“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free!”*** That is the legacy of the Reformation: freedom restored.

Think about what makes you feel free? For me, nothing gives me a sense of freedom like a long road trip. The longer the road trip, the freer I feel. Two years ago Lisa and I took a vacation out to Oregon and back. I remember that feeling of freedom as we rolled over the borders of Nebraska, Wyoming, Utah and a dozen other states.

What makes *you* feel free? The golf course? Alone time? Party time?

What makes you feel free may be different, but the *feeling* is very similar for all. It is a heart that is light, almost like it’s floating off the ground. There is nothing weighing it down—no worries, no obligations, no guilt.

God would have us revel in spiritual freedom. Through the apostle he tells us: ***“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”*** In that verse you can feel direction. Freed from something. Freed for something. What?

My fellow Christians, you know. You have been to this church and heard the word of God often enough to know what has Christ set you free from. You are free from the guilt and condemnation of your own personal sins because of what Jesus did for you. You also have a good idea of what Christ has set you free for: a life lived in thanks to God.

Every week you listen as the prophets and the apostles weekly lift your eyes off the measly prizes and goals of this earth. You know that Christ didn’t set us free *from* the sort of oppression or *for* the sort of freedom that Jesus’ disciples imagined when they asked, *“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”* (Acts 1:6). A political freedom—oh, that is nothing compared to what Jesus has blessed us with. You believe it and know it!

Yet the spiritual liberty Christ won for us on the cross is always under attack. That’s why we remember Reformation every year. It’s not all about monks walking up to churches and hammering notices on the door giving their superiors what-for. We are into thanking God for the restoration of spiritual freedom that by his grace we enjoy to this day. This day is a reminder that we need to continually watch and beware lest the freedom Christ won is taken from us, or worse, lest we voluntarily surrender it. As Paul said in our reading, ***“Do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”***

It can be helpful to understand this by seeing exactly what Paul was talking about in our reading. Paul was speaking to people who had simply believed that Jesus Christ was their Savior from sin and that through faith they were saved. That’s it. But then along came some people who said, “No, that’s part of the truth, but not the whole truth. You have to not only believe, but also do. Faith plus doing is how you get saved.” These particular false teachers were adding on top the Jewish ceremonial law. Among a lot of other things, they insisted on the sign of the covenant that God had made with Abraham: circumcision. Paul told those Christians, ***“I tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare… [that everyone who does that] has fallen away from grace.”***

Jesus alone saves. Faith alone frees. It’s not Jesus + something. Like marriage. A man cannot say marriage is my wife + someone else too. As soon as he makes that addition, marriage lies shattered on the pavement. As soon as you add someone or something to Jesus for salvation, you have lost Christ, you have thrown away grace. Paul was protecting the true Gospel: Jesus had done 100% of the work to save them.

It had happened among the Christians of Martin Luther’s day. There were all kinds of rules added for salvation. Rules about not singing in church, food you couldn’t eat, paying money to reduce the punishment of sin because Jesus, so they said, had not paid for it all. In a hundred ways over a thousand years the free forgiveness that Christ Jesus spent his precious blood to win was, instead of being freely proclaimed, locked up in a cupboard and doled out for money or sweat equity. Martin Luther was protecting the Gospel message: Jesus had done 100% of the work to save them.

The same thought still spooks around in different ways. It is our natural religion. I can remember many years ago getting to the end of an adult confirmation class, and I asked a woman, “So, why is God going to let you into heaven?” She answered, “Because I do good things for other people.” (The correct answer is, “Because God’s Word promises that all who believe in Jesus will be saved.”) We reviewed a couple Bible passages, but she insisted on her answer, “Because I do good things for other people.” She *needed* to learn some things before I could confirm her. ***“You who are trying to be justified by [obeying the] law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.”***

We alienate ourselves from Christ when we make the way of salvation anything more than the simple truth that Christ Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins. It happens when we realize that we don’t give God our time or treasure like we should. We realize that we are shaving off the edges of one of the Ten Commandments. So then then we try to make up the difference and do a little something extra: help another person, be extra nice. That’s not how it works. Wrong answer! Repent of sin and trust Jesus!

Only in Jesus are we forgiven. We return to that truth, we proclaim that truth, we reclaim that truth every Reformation, because the moment we depart from that truth, or add anything to that truth, or hedge our bets on that truth, we lose that truth. We must protect the true Gospel: Jesus has done 100% of the work to save us!

It really is freedom! There are no worries about whether I’ve done enough, no uncertainties about heaven, just Jesus’ promises. Reformation is freedom restored. It is God’s gift. It is God’s mercy. It is God’s declaration.

Reformation celebrates the pure Gospel of Christ saving us. But our reading tells us the story doesn’t end with us being freed by Christ.

Christ has given us freedom not just *from* something, but also *for* something. Verse 1: ***“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”***

I want you to take note of the language there. ***“Christ has set us free.”*** It lets us know that we have been saved, we have walked out of the prison, and now as we stand there blinking in the bright sunlight of Christ’s freedom, we wonder, “What next? Now where?” Then verse 6 adds, ***“The thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”*** Our new purpose is to love God and people.

You see, doing what God wants is not talking about unsaved people getting saved. This is talking about what saved people do. To use big catechism class words, this is not justification, but sanctification. This is what comes after being saved. Our faith expresses its trust in God through love.

Since Jesus completely saved us and we don’t have anything to worry about, we have a unique ability to truly love, to love without trying to get something out of our love. Do you realize how rare that is?

There was a commedian who many years ago joked about how his very hard and strict parents, who, when they became grandparents, changed into very soft and lenient grandparents. He thought about it and came to the conclusion, “Of course they’re nice now. They’re getting old. They’re trying to get into heaven!” Which is funny in a way. But it is not at all true about true Christians. We are not nice people because we’re trying to get into heaven. Jesus has already given us heaven. So now we have this second freedom, not just to be freely saved, but also to love freely.

Lots of people do good things because they think their eternity depends on it. We don’t act like that. We’re not caring because we have to be. There is no cloud of guilt or threats hanging over our heads. We’re not nice because we’re trying to cushion our place in heaven. We don’t get all helpful because we get something out of it.

Now let the message of Reformation ring in your heart, ***“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.”*** Live, always mindful of what Christ has set you free from, and what he has set you free for. Amen.