

“From Slavery to Freedom!”
Galatians 5:1, 13-26
The Rev. Dr. William E. W. Robinson
Salem Presbyterian Church
The Third Sunday after Pentecost
June 30, 2019

I invite you to use your imagination. Imagine this:

Once upon a time...You. Were. *Slaves*. Fran, *you* were a slave. Reid, *you* were a slave. Lee, *you* were a slave. Eddie, *you* were a slave. We were *all* slaves (every single one of us)! We were slaves to...*Sin*. Sin was your master and mine.

As Sin’s slaves, the good that we wanted to do, that we knew we should do, we couldn’t do. No matter how much we *wanted* to do it. No matter how hard we *tried* to do it. Under the thumb of Sin, we didn’t have the power to do it. Sin was that strong, that powerful a master. As its slaves, we *had* to obey it.

Sin would chain us to idolatry, so that we idolized money, prestige, status, possessions or whatever is *not* God. They filled our hearts, *not* God. They monopolized our time and energy and attention and passion.

As its slaves, Sin would also shackle us to selfish ambition: “I’ll do whatever I *have* to do to get ahead.” Shackle us to a consuming envy. Shackle us to lust.

As its slaves, it would bind us to outbursts of anger, to cutthroat competition...to these and other “works of the flesh” like the ones the apostle Paul lists in Galatians 5.

As slaves to Sin, our lives (once upon a time) were sin-filled, awful, and pathetic. [Our Director of Music Reed Carter plays “Dun!” “Dun!” “*Dunnn!*” loudly and with the lowest notes on the organ!]

In his letters, Paul says that's Just. How. *Bad*. It. Was.

But *not* any more.

Because we are *no longer* slaves to Sin. Sin is *no longer* our master. No, thanks be to God...We. Are. *Free!* [Reed leads the choir in singing the chorus "Free! Free! Set them free!" from Sting's 1985 hit single "If You Love Somebody, Set Them Free."]

Yes, we are Free! Free! because God in Christ through the Spirit has Set. Us. *Free!*

Now, *Christ* is our Master. We obey him. Now, we are free to do the good we want to do (that we couldn't do when Sin was our master). Free to do the good we know we should do. Free from the shackles of idolatry, selfish ambition, consuming envy, lust, outbursts of anger, and cutthroat competition. We're free from the chains of these and any other "works of the flesh" (like those Paul names in Galatians 5).

On this Sunday before Independence Day, we can think of our Christian freedom like this: At the end the Revolutionary War, the American colonies were free: Free, Free from England's rule. They did not *have* to obey King George any more. They did not *have* to obey Parliament's laws any more.

But we can't obey Christ our Master *on our own*. We need *help*. At this point, I could've asked the choir to also sing the opening refrain of the Beatles' 1965 hit single, "Help!": "Help! I need somebody. Help! Not just *anybody*. Help! You know I *need* someone. *Help!*"

The help we need to obey Christ in our lives is God's Spirit.

The Spirit, who dwells in you and in me, *lives* in us, gives us the power, gives us the ability to obey Christ. To do what he teaches us. Paul sums up Christ's teaching in verse 14: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (part of the so-called Greatest

Commandment). This command includes loving one another (Christ’s so-called Love Commandment). Paul expresses it in verse 13 when he writes: “serve one another through love.”

With the Spirit’s help, we are able to “stand” in this freedom!

With the Spirit’s help, we never *have* to be slaves to Sin again and do its fleshly works.

With the Spirit’s help, we are able to bear the fruit of our freedom in Christ: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control”!

One scholar says it’s not a coincidence that love heads this list because the other eight virtues in the list are all concrete expressions of love. God in Christ—through his Spirit—frees and empowers us—to live and express *that love* every single day of our lives!

So, what will we do?

Will we act as if Sin is still our master? Letting it get the best of us? Listening to it, obeying it, even though *We. Don’t. Have. To.?*

Or will we walk in step with the Spirit? Will we ask the Spirit—*daily*—to *help* us let go of that grudge. Not look at pornography. Not stay angry at her. Not ignore injustice. Not look down our noses at him. Not neglect our neighbors in need. Not get even? Will we let the Spirit—*daily*—help us instead to bear the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

What will we do?

Please pray with me: Lord God, we thank you for our freedom in Christ. The freedom *not* to obey Sin, no matter how much it tempts us. The freedom instead to walk in step with the Spirit, who lives in

us. To ask the Spirit—each day—to help us do what’s right in your eyes...to love our neighbors, including one another and even our enemies...to bear the Spirit’s fruit every single day of our lives.
Amen.