

The First Sunday after Christmas – Pr. Faugstad sermon  
Galatians 4:1-7: “You Are No Longer a Slave, but a Son.”  
December 30/31, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

**In Nomine Iesu**

+ + +

LORD God, gracious Father, who in the fullness of time sent Your Son to assume our flesh and become our Brother, we thank You for Your truth and fatherly goodness in giving us this Savior, by whose birth we are delivered from sin, death, Satan, and hell; and we humbly ask You, keep us until the end in true knowledge of our Redeemer, that, with all the holy angels, we may rejoice at His nativity and behold Him, together with You and the Holy Spirit, in glory and majesty, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 57)

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)*

---

*The sermon text for today is taken from the fourth chapter of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:*

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. / But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.  
(ESV)

---

*These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)*

In Christ Jesus, who paid the price of our redemption, so we might be set free from sin and death, dear fellow redeemed:

On September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that all slaves in the southern states were freed from slavery effective January 1 of the following year. But the Confederate army did not surrender until April 9, 1865, more than two years later. Even then, slavery persisted in several outlying areas in the south, especially in the state of Texas where the Union army did not have a strong presence.

The order of emancipation was not read and enforced in Texas until June 19, 1865. So even though the freedom of the slaves had been declared two and a half years earlier, the slaves did not gain their freedom until word was brought right to them. To mark the day of their freedom, some former slaves celebrated a “jubilee day” the following year on June 19, a day that is now known as “Juneteenth” and observed as a national holiday.

Long before all these events took place, St. Paul spoke about slavery on a much broader scale. In fact, he referred to all people as slaves. In today’s reading, he said that “*when we were children, [we] were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.*” These “*elementary principles*” were the

things that agreed with human thinking. For the Jews, this included their extra demands placed on top of God's Law which were not about words and actions of love but about maintaining outward obedience. For the Gentiles, these "*elementary principles*" were their methods of operating in the world which often violated the moral Law of God.

Many of the people who heard Paul preach and teach probably laughed when he called them slaves. Many people still laugh at this idea. Unbelieving people in our community and around the world think that freedom consists in establishing their own set of rules, living by their own thoughts and plans, doing whatever they feel like doing. And sometimes believers are tricked by this. Believers may think of themselves as restricted, tied down, by the rules and regulations of "the church," and they long to experience what it is like to live totally free—to live "totally for me."

*That*, writes St. Paul, *that* is slavery. Because if you decide to follow your heart wherever it leads you—away from responsibility, away from family, away from the needs of your neighbor, away from the Word of God—you will not find the freedom you seek. You may find pleasure for a while like the prodigal son did. But people's sin and guilt always have a way of catching up with them. So does their mortality. Do you think the rich and famous care much about the wild life they lived when the cold eyes of death are staring them right in the face?

True freedom, the emancipation of ourselves, cannot be found by "doing it my way." Whatever *we* try to do, whether trying to live a strict life of discipline or living a reckless life of indulgence, cannot free us from our sin and death and the holy Law of God that condemns us. And since we cannot secure our own freedom, we either have no hope of freedom at all, or another has to secure it for us.

St. Paul has sweet words for us, something we might call "God's Emancipation Proclamation": "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" Of course there is more to the Proclamation than this, more details that this passage doesn't cover. But those details are at least summarized by the one word "*redeem*."

To "redeem" means to "buy back," and the one doing the redeeming is the eternal Son of God, whom the Father sent to be "*born of woman, born under the law.*" He had to be born under the law like we are, so He could redeem us by His perfect life and His innocent suffering and death. It is difficult to imagine a free person willingly taking the place of a slave subject to terrible abuse at the hands of his master. But that is exactly what Jesus did for us.

"[T]hough he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2Co. 8:9). He became poor by "*taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" (Phi. 2:7-8). He let Himself be attacked again and again by "*the father of lies*" (Joh. 8:44), who tried to tempt Him to give up His mission of salvation. He let Himself be falsely accused, repeatedly struck, spit on, whipped, and crowned with thorns by the hands of both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Then nails were pounded through Jesus' hands and feet, and He was put on display on the cross for all to mock and laugh at Him. This is what the Father sent His Son to do. This is what the Son faithfully did to redeem you. As Paul wrote earlier in Galatians, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'*" Jesus redeemed you – He bought you back – from your sin and death, by shedding His precious blood for you and dying in your place (1Pe. 1:18-19).

That is how your freedom was gained. He won it for you. He entered your slavery, so you would have His freedom. He became poor, so you would be rich. This is true of every single person who is a slave to sin and death. Jesus did not suffer and die only for some. He did it for everyone. John the Baptizer stated it clearly at the beginning of Jesus' public work: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*" (Joh. 1:29).

But what if you don't feel like your sin is taken away? What if you continue to be plagued by the guilt of sinful things you have done? Or what if you are terrified of death, or you carry a heavy burden of sorrow because someone you dearly loved has died, and it feels like you will never see them again?

The slaves in Texas were legally free for a long time, but they didn't know it. And when word finally reached them of their emancipation, I'm sure there were many who doubted it could be true. All they had known was slavery. They were slaves, as their fathers were before them, and as their fathers were before them.

The same is true in our case. We were born into Adam's slavery of sin and death, and it seems too good to be true that we could actually be free of it. We keep on sinning, and each day is a day closer to our death. So many wonderful, faithful people have died. Are we really free? How can we be sure? Today's reading says that the Son of God redeemed us, "*so that we might receive adoption as sons.*" He purchased us from our slavery, so that we "*might be His own*" and "*live under Him in His kingdom*" (Luther's Explanation to the Second Article).

That purchase agreement was sealed with your name on it when the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart at your Baptism. Your Baptism is when God officially adopted you as His own. He washed you clean of your sin by water and the Word and transferred you from a state of death to His inheritance of life. When He brought you to faith through the Word, He put you in the position of His Son, because all who believe in Jesus are members of His holy body.

Since you are adopted as God's son, you stand to inherit everything Jesus obtained in perfect obedience to His Father's will. God the Father put His stamp of approval on everything Jesus did "*by raising him from the dead*" (Act. 17:31). That means the holy life Jesus lived perfectly fulfilled God's Law and cancels out your sinful life. And the payment He made by His death on the cross satisfies the debt you have with God.

So even though you may not feel like you are forgiven and you struggle with guilt, by faith in Jesus you are no longer a slave to sin. He set you free by the price of His blood. And even though you may fear death or grieve the death of a loved one, Jesus assures you, "*I am the resurrection and the life.... Because I live, you also will live*" (Joh. 11:25, 14:19).

These are promises that we need to hear again and again, just as I'm sure the slaves in Texas wanted to hear the Juneteenth proclamation over and over again. The Word and Sacraments are God's proclamation of grace toward us sinners. They are the means by which He calms our consciences, comforts our hearts, and strengthens our faith. Through these means, God sends *"the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"*

The Spirit's powerful work in us through the Word is the reason we came to church all through this past year, and the reason we will keep coming in the year ahead. It is no surprise that the Simeon and Anna in today's Gospel account were led by the Holy Spirit to Jesus in the temple – in church (Luk. 2:25-38).

Here, the Holy Spirit brings us Jesus with all His saving gifts. Here, the Holy Spirit prepares us to share the sweet message of freedom with others who have been freed from their slavery but haven't heard the good news yet. Here, the Holy Spirit says to each one of us personally, no matter how difficult or stained our past might be: **"You Are No Longer a Slave, but a Son."** And since you are a son of God, all that is His is yours.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.*

+ + +