

Freed to Be Slaves?

C-Proper 8: Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

June 26, 2016, Robert Woody

Sermon Theme: We are set free in Christ, but we should not use our freedom for self-indulgence, but rather, through love to serve, to be a "slave" to one another.

Children's Sermon:

Did you know that we are all "slaves"? I'm a slave. All of them are slaves. You are slaves. According to the Bible, we are all slaves.

What is a slave? What does it mean to be a slave? It means we are controlled not by our self, but by someone else, our "master."

In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he says,

"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

So we start out as slaves, then, if we follow the Jesus Way, we are set free. Yeah, that's good. But listen to the 2nd part.

"For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love ***become slaves to one another***. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

So we all start out as slaves. Then we can be set free from whatever is controlling us by Jesus. But then, we are supposed to become slaves again so that our lives are controlled by the Love of God and by loving and serving one another.

OK, we are not literally "slaves"; we are not literally owned and controlled by another person, but there are things in our lives that do control us, they tell us what to do.

It can be greed, a desire to be popular, or a desire for lots of money and lots of stuff, for a gigantic house, and a super cool convertible, for lots of attention.

It can be addiction to alcohol or drugs or bad behaviors.

These bad things can become our master and literally control us and our lives, and we become slaves to them. But if we choose to follow Jesus and the Jesus Way, we can be set free of all those things.

But Paul says we can't just float around in this free space, always making perfect decisions. Paul says we have to ***choose*** to become slaves ***again***, but slaves of something that is good and helpful, that will make our lives truly good and meaningful, not just fancy. Paul says, through love, we become slaves to one another.

And we do this by following Jesus' most important teaching, "Love your neighbor, as yourself."

God and Jesus and Paul want us to be slaves of love.

Let love of others, our family, our friends, our neighbors, even strangers; let loving them, control us, shape our lives. And if we do that, [which is never easy, and requires hard work and sacrifice,] we will live in the Kingdom of God, and have an incredibly good and abundant life. We should let love control our lives.

Can you give me an example of being a slave of love, when you've sacrificed or suffered, so you could love someone?

This is so simple, but it is not easy. If we will do our best to be a "slave of love," which will never be easy, and which will require us to be willing to work hard and endure pain and suffering, we will be filled with joy, we will be the happiest people in the world.

OK fellow slaves. Remember who your master is: Love.

Adult Sermon:

How many of you think of yourselves as "slaves"? How many of you want to be slaves?

How many are willing, if that's what Jesus wants of you, to be "slaves"?

God wants to free us from sin. To set us free from whatever is controlling or dominating or distorting our lives.

"For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)

I like that! God, through Christ, has set us FREE! We're FREE!

But apparently, according to God, and Jesus, and Paul, we, as human beings, are not capable of independently managing our freedom.

We can't live the good and Abundant Life God wants for us, unless we have some kind of structure or boundaries.

We all have to choose a master.

We as Christians can choose money or power or self-indulgence or alcohol or drugs or sex, -- basically going back to the life of sin.

Or we can choose to love our neighbor, not in words or in theory, but to the extent of being a “slave” – being willing to suffer, to sacrifice, to put someone else’s needs above our own.

Paul, following the Way of Jesus, is talking about “radical” love! And if we are not willing to love radically, sacrificially, we won’t be a slave to love. We will again become slaves to self, to sin.

Our Gospel reading today, which you know I did not pick, is one of the most radical and challenging of all the Gospel readings. Jesus is saying, “Don’t just make following me or seeking the Kingdom of God a priority in your life or even the highest priority in your life, make it your “master.” Period.

Although Jesus doesn’t explicitly use the image of slave and master, that’s exactly what he’s talking about. Follow me and my Way, not like a friend, or a volunteer, but like a slave. Totally committed. Make love a priority that cannot be set aside, even temporarily, to serve some other priority.

Follow me, even if it means abandoning your home. Don’t say, “I will follow you wherever you go” unless you mean it, literally!

“To another Jesus said, ‘Follow me.’ “But he responded, ‘Lord, first let me go and bury my father.’ “But Jesus said to him, ‘Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.’”

We can’t even put our family, taking care of our aging father or mother, ahead of immediately following Jesus? In the Jewish tradition of Jesus’ day, it was a major responsibility of the children to care for their aging parents until they were buried.

Jesus is not saying, “Don’t love your parent.” He is saying “Don’t make following the Jewish traditions or following the “norm” your top priority.

“Make Love your top priority, your master. “Make following me and my Way of Love your priority above all others.” That may mean taking care of your mom or dad. But out of love, not out of tradition, or obligation, or so you can get more of the inheritance. Sometimes “Radical Love” will break the norms and traditions.

We are called to be slaves of love, slaves to our neighbors. If we are just “volunteers” or even “employees” or “workers” for Love and for the Kingdom, there will be times when we take off for “holidays” or “vacation.” We may be good committed workers, but are we slaves, in the sense Paul and Jesus are talking?

Jesus is saying, “I’m not asking you to be my volunteer or my employee, I’m asking you to be my slave,” to follow my Way, even when it’s difficult and painful and requires sacrifice and suffering.

Fulfilling my role as pastor or rector of a church, and even doing it well with great commitment and devotion, is apparently not enough. I need to be a 24/7 SLAVE to Love and the Kingdom. Always serving love. Even on my days off. Even on sabbatical. Is my relationship with the God of Love just one of my life priorities? Maybe even my highest priority? Does it, along with other, lesser priorities, sort of help mold and shape my life? Or is it my master? Does it trump everything, always?

Do you make coming to Sunday worship a discipline, something you do every Sunday, rain or shine? Or is it something you do when you “feel” like it? Do you make reading Scripture a discipline that you do regularly?

Do you attend Adult Formation regularly, even when it’s inconvenient, or challenging? Or only occasionally? Do you pray regularly? Or just when it feels right? Who or what is really controlling or directing your life?

What if in every situation, every time of challenge, my first thought was: “What would love do? Where is the Spirit of Love guiding or pointing me? What if I make Love my master, in this situation?”

Why would we do this? Why live such a radically committed life?

Paul believed that if we live by the Spirit of Love, if we are a slave to loving our neighbor, as opposed to gratifying the desires of our flesh, we will live the Abundant Life, we will live in the Kingdom, we will live a most fruitful life.

That’s how Paul ends the passage we read today:

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control . . . let us be guided by the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:25)

That’s the good, Abundant Life!

But it all depends on who or what is your real master?