

4th SUNDAY after PENTECOST

July 3, 2022

READING

Galatians 6:1-16

¹My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. ²Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ³Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ⁴For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁵All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁶For all must carry their own loads. ⁷Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. ⁸Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁹If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. ¹⁰So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹¹So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith. ¹²See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹³It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹⁴Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁵May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁶For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁷As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

GOSPEL READING

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. ⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go

out into its streets and say, ¹¹“Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.” ¹⁶“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.” ¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” ¹⁸He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. ¹⁹See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. ²⁰Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

SERMON

Pr. Mark Bogen

Something To Brag About

Lord, may we never boast of anything except of your giving of yourself on the cross. We pray this in your name, Amen.

On July 4, 1826, one-hundred-ninety-six years ago, the second and third presidents of the United States died within hours of each other, 50 years to the day of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.

Those two former presidents were John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. These men were good friends in their youth, but after Adams was replaced by Jefferson, political disagreements separated them, and they never saw each other again. They were eventually reconciled in the last 14 years of their lives and exchanged many affectionate letters.

When John Adams died at the age of 91, his last words were, “Thomas Jefferson still lives.” But this was incorrect. Because Thomas Jefferson himself had died just hours before at his home in Monticello, Virginia. His last words were, “Is it the 4th?” After he heard, “Yes,” he closed his eyes and died.

Tomorrow will be the 246th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Those of you who are old enough can remember the many celebrations surrounding the Bicentennial celebration of 1976. It’s hard to believe that 43 years have passed since that amazing year of bicentennial celebrations.

People in other parts of the world are quite amused -- and sometimes put off — by the pride we Americans take in our country. How often have we heard speakers declare, “We are the greatest nation on earth.” Well, we certainly are the strongest nation --and the wealthiest. Because of that, we surely have more responsibilities than any other nation on earth. It brings to mind the words of Jesus in Luke, chapter 12: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”

Certainly, it is good to have pride in our country, or in our school, our favorite sports

team, or whatever we take pride in. But here is another perspective on pride. Christian singer Wayne Watson says this:

"The older I get, the less there is to be proud of and the more there is to be thankful for... I'm more thankful for my family than I am proud of them, because I realize most of what they are is out of my hands. Most of what has happened to me in my career is not a result of me walking the streets of Nashville with songs trying to get them cut trying to get a record deal. Most of it has been the blessing of God. So, my 'thankfulness' list is growing much longer, while my 'pride' list is becoming much shorter."

I think Watson is on to something there. I am certainly proud to be an American, using the words of that popular Lee Greenwood song, but perhaps the more appropriate word would be "thankful." Thankful to be an American. I was born here, so America was a gift to me. I can't say it's something I achieved, something I earned, or something I take pride in. It just happened. It was an accident of birth. And so, I consider myself lucky.

It's interesting that one of our scripture readings for this Fourth of July weekend should come from Paul's letter to the Galatians: Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christian liberty. It is about the freedom that Christ brings. It is a very pointed and strongly worded letter. Paul wrote it, scholars tell us, because he saw that the liberty that Christians had come to know was in danger of eroding.

Let me be more specific. There was a group of early Christians who were infiltrating the churches of Galatia in Asia Minor known as Judaizers. They taught that before a person could be saved, it was necessary to follow the law of Moses as well as have faith in Christ; That meant that in addition to baptism as a sign of the new believer's walk with Christ, there was required the rite of circumcision.

This was a scandalous idea to Paul. He had tried very hard to live according to the law of Moses before his conversion on the road to Damascus, and it had brought him not liberty but bondage, not freedom, but fear.

He could not bear the thought that new believers would have this yoke pressed upon them. And so, he wrote forcefully to the church of Galatia that salvation was by faith alone. Not by works. Not by ceremony, nor by the cutting of human flesh, but by faith in what Christ did for us upon the cross. And so, this is why Paul says in our reading for today: "May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Paul's choice of words here is interesting. He is boasting not of what he has done, but of what was done on his behalf. He's basically saying the opposite of what he means. Living under the law gave people the opportunity to boast. "I am a good person. I keep the law. I observe the commandments. I have been circumcised. Therefore, I am one of God's chosen." Christians cannot do that. Oh, we can brag, but it's like bragging about being citizens of this country when we were simply born here. So, you are a good person. So, what! That won't get even your big toe inside the gate of heaven. We're not saved by anything we do; we are saved by what Christ has done.

People are so funny. We like to brag, don't we? It helps us feel good about ourselves.

We love to chant, “We’re number one, we’re number one!” Since I grew up in Minnesota, it should be no surprise that I am a Minnesota Twins fan. Special memories for me as a Twins fan was when the Twins won the World Series, first in 1987, and then again in 1991, both series going seven games. There’s a certain amount of pride that goes along with those kinds of victories.

Cleveland fans finally experienced the end of a 52-year drought in national championships for major league sports teams when the Cavaliers became NBA Champs in 2016. We know, as we’ve felt it, even though we had nothing to do with the physical effort that was required to win those championships.

There’s something within us that wants to believe we are number one, we are the greatest, whether it is our kids, our team, or our nation, and then we are confronted with the hard truth that it’s not about us at all. It’s about a humble carpenter from a small town in the Middle East who lived 2000 years ago who was tortured and died on a cross like a common criminal. You want to boast about something? St. Paul says to us, you want to glory in something? Glory in this: Jesus Christ died for you”

So, what does this mean for us, gathered here in this place, on this day? First it reminds us that we have so much to be thankful for. How can we ever thank God enough for all God has given us? for our salvation, for our freedom, for the many good things that make up our lives.

Thousands of refugees who have come to the United States tell stories of how they have found freedom, peace, and an opportunity to thrive. After fleeing a civil war in their region and spending 12 years in primitive refugee camps, Hassan and Nur Lamungu and their children left Somalia and began a new life in the United States. With the help of U.S. agencies, they now have a place to live, Hassan has a job, and their children are in school. Although they have faced many changes and challenges since moving here, the Lamungus are very happy to be in the United States. As Hassan says, “We can live in peace. There is a law in America: nobody can take your life. That’s what makes me believe in peace.”

We simply cannot take these rights for granted. We’re lucky people — luckier than any of us deserve. But that’s the point. What we need today is not pride, but gratitude — gratitude to a merciful God~ gratitude for the sacrifices of people of faith through the ages who have made it possible for us to enjoy the privileges that are ours. We have so much to be thankful for. And that means a second thing. We may be free, but we are also tremendously indebted to the one who gave his life for us.

You and I have all the benefits that go with being citizens of this free and prosperous land. What kind of people would we be if we did nothing to help make this an even stronger and freer country? It’s always amazing to me that some of the people who wave the flag so publicly are sometimes the first who will cheat on their income taxes, the last to serve in the military, and are among the millions who fail to vote on election day. How can you say you’re “proud” to be an American, and at the same time despise its basic institutions?

And then there is our debt to God. Do not misunderstand me. None of this has anything to do with earning your salvation. Jesus Christ paid your way a long time ago. And

you don't have to give God anything in return. You don't even have to be a nice person. You will be a nice person if Christ lives in your heart, but do you understand that you don't have to be? You can be grouchy. You can be sleazy. You can be irresponsible. Do you hear what I'm saying? Christ has set you free. But what kind of person would you be if you didn't feel a sense of obligation, a sense of call, a sense that you should live life on a higher plane because of what has been done on your behalf? You and I have so much to be thankful for. We are free, but we are also indebted.

But there's one more thing we need to see: True freedom begins at the cross Calvary. Maybe you don't feel free today. Maybe you don't feel thankful. Maybe you're hurting, hurting so badly that you can't see what God has done for you. That can happen to us, can't it? Sometimes the pain is so great that it can almost eclipse the sunshine of God's love. We've all been there. I need to tell you that there's healing there. There's freedom, there's love and understanding and peace.

Let me tell you about someone who has found that kind of freedom. Her name is Lori. When Lori was 12, her father killed her mother and her mother's best friend, and then killed himself. Lori and her younger sister witnessed the murders.

Lori claims that she never would have recovered from such a tragedy if it weren't for her faith in Jesus Christ. When Lori was eight years old, her mother sent her to Vacation Bible School. This was the first time she had heard about God's love for her. She gave her life to Christ that summer. She claims that it was Jesus' presence, protection and peace that helped her to cope with her family's tragedy. She is now happily married and the mother of three children. Don't you think if God can set Lori free from the emotional pain she suffered, God can set you free as well?

We have so much to be thankful for on this Independence Day weekend, 2022. We are free, but we also owe a great debt that can never be repaid. There is freedom at the foot of the Cross, and that, indeed, is something to brag about.