

SERMON FOR JANUARY 31, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 4: 1-3

THEME: LIVING FOR THE LORD

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, **2** so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. **3** For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

In the name of Jesus:

William Wilberforce was elected as a member of the British Parliament in 1780. He was one of the youngest members of Parliament, elected during a time when England was in the midst of the American Revolutionary War. The slave trade was big business in Britain but that was about to change. During Wilberforce's second term, he became a Christian, and was so convinced in the truths of Christianity that he sought to apply his faith to his political life.

Within the next several years he joined a movement to abolish the British slave trade and soon became the leading spokesman for this and other social reforms. As a result of his work, Parliament eventually ended the slave trade in 1807. He spent the rest of his life working to abolish slavery, and in 1833, just a few days before his death, slavery was abolished in Britain. Wilberforce

sought to use his freedom as a Christian not for his own gain, but for the welfare of others.

Freedom today though means an entirely different thing to many. Today freedom is seen as having no obligation, to anyone or anything. If you are free you can do what you want, when you want. Freedom, though, for the Christian, has an entirely different meaning. Christians have been set free from the power of sin, Satan, and death. Many look at how we live and wonder what Christianity is all about. As believers in Christ, we have been forgiven in Christ, set free and now empowered by the Spirit to give an answer to those who seek the meaning of truth, freedom, and the power of God's love.

How shall we live our lives? For ourselves or for others? Do we live according to our passions, or according to the will of God? These were real questions asked by those to whom Peter was writing to in our text for today. These early Christians had no country to call their own. They were looked down upon and despised by those with whom they lived in their communities. The norm at that time was for people to live according to their passions and pleasures. It was a no holds barred way of life, described by Peter as "living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry."

Peter, though, reminds these Christians that they were called to be different. In fact, they were different! Peter writes: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. **11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” These Christians were bought with the price of Christ's blood, so now they were called by God to honor God with how they lived their lives.

Jesus has purchased and has won you from sin, Satan, and death. You now belong to God, and God calls you to give an answer to others about your faith in Jesus with how you live. Not as the world lives, but living in the way of Christ. We are to have the same attitude as Jesus had, who didn't count equality with God as something to be used to His own advantage, rather He lived His life as a servant, humbling Himself to the point of dying on a cross.

Christ has set you free! But your freedom is not now to be used to feed your passions. You are not to live according to your emotions. You are called

to live according to the Word of God. As the Church of Christ we are to use our freedom not for our human passions but for the will of God.

The Bible explains what kind of freedom you now have and how you are now to use this freedom “For freedom Christ has set you free, **22** the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal 5).

This freedom has been given to you and has been purchased for you at great cost, nothing less than the blood of Jesus shed on Calvary’s cross. Jesus freely lived in His love and service for you, making you His own in Baptism, so that as His child you will live your life in love for Jesus and live a life of service to others.

Luther wrote a wonderful little book on this subject titled “On Christian Freedom.” In this little book, he describes the Christian life as a life of paradox. Two statements summarize the Christian life. They are both true, and do not contradict the other. Luther writes: **A Christian is an utterly free man, lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is an utterly dutiful man, servant of all, subject to all.**

Many people today think that the Christian faith is all about having a good attitude. There are others who believe that when they have the liberty of faith, they can then do as they please. But the Christian faith is different. The Christian faith is one of believing in Jesus Christ and following Jesus, of denying oneself, taking up the cross, and living for Jesus. We have been set free, free not to do whatever we please, but free to live in a type of voluntary slavery, where we live for one another. A freedom that seeks to use the freedom given by Christ to love and care for each other and for our neighbor, hearing God's voice and heeding His call to love one another as I, Jesus, have loved you. This means that we live a life of love, using our freedom not to indulge our passions and to behave in a manner which would destroy relationships, but to practice the fruits of the Spirit, living in love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, self control and generosity for others.

The needs of the world are enormous, and some may think that the task is too large for one congregation to make a difference. But you and I have been given a wonderful gift of freedom in Christ and we are called to use that freedom not to indulge ourselves but to love and care for our neighbors.

There was a time near the end of Jesus' ministry when a woman came up to him and anointed His head with a jar of expensive perfume. When some of His disciples saw this, they asked, "Why waste all of this, it could have been

given to the poor.” But Jesus answered them by saying, “Leave her alone and don’t trouble her, she is doing something good for Me, she has done what she could.” (Mark 14).

We may think that we may not be able to do much for the Lord, but that which we do, when done to the Lord and to His glory, is used by Him to accomplish much good. When we use our freedom to help others, we show the love of Christ, and witness to others our faith in Jesus. So make the most of your freedom in Christ. Use the opportunities God gives you to love others, living for the Lord. To the glory of God and in Jesus’ name.

Amen