

## Creating Christian Freedom – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 – January 17, 2021

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Earlier this week a few people chuckled when they saw I was going to preach on this passage. Each week the lectionary provides at least four scripture texts from which to choose, and with three other options, why on earth did I pick the one that talks about fornication and prostitution. Part of me simply wanted to hear Joy have to struggle through reading the passage – alright, I am just kidding! That’s not the reason.

Actually what struck me was the first verse – All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial. And it reminded me of another of Paul’s letters where he also talked about having freedom from the law. That in Christ we have freedom to live away from the constraints of the Jewish Law – the Torah. When Paul said this to the early Christian converts, especially those who were not Jews but Gentiles, he often had to clarify its meaning. When Paul wrote his letters to the churches, he was writing to very specific situations.

The Corinthian church was Paul’s problem child. And he devoted a lot of words to correcting not only their actions but their understandings. And while this passage is focusing specifically on some morality issues regarding types of sexual activity, the underlying principle applies in all sorts of situations. Freedom from the law does not equate to a free for all – an attitude of “anything goes.” But that is exactly how the members of the Corinthian church interpreted it. Paul was a Pharisee, so he was well-versed in the Jewish Law. He knew what he meant when he said “freedom from the law.” The Corinthians were mostly Gentiles, so they really had no frame of reference.

So all this information and misinformation about what Paul meant when he talked about freedom from the law – led to everyone interpreting it in a way that was beneficial for them as individuals, but not so much for their community of faith as a whole. It was a case of individualism – do what feels good and right for you, and who cares how it impacts anyone else. Pursue a life of rugged individualism.

And looking at it that way, it’s hard not to notice a direct correlation with what we see taking place all around us in our country. I have been hearing a lot of people screaming about freedom and the right to do whatever they want. No one is going to make them wear a mask in public to keep others safe from the pandemic. Or they feel like it’s okay to protest in public decked out with military style equipment and guns, and that’s acceptable to some as long as they have the correct color skin. Those who pursue the dream of individualism have no concept of what a civilized society is and does, let alone what a community of faith might resemble.

When we look again at the events of last Wednesday, some of the violent activity was committed by people way out on the fringes of polite society – anarchists, if you will – conspirators, terrorists. However you want to label them. Clearly they do not have your or my best interests at heart. They

are in it for self-serving and destructive reasons. But then there are the other ones who just went along with the crowd... and when the crowd became a mob, they did not turn away. They kept going. Is that freedom? Or is that simply succumbing to the will of the mob?

If everyone is pursuing their own idea of freedom, why do I have images in my mind of survival of the fittest? If freedom is a concept that everyone can define their own way, and the goal is for everyone to be free, is it not just anarchy? Clearly, freedom from the law, as Paul understands, is not supposed to be a free for all. So what is it?

Paul describes freedom in Christ as anything but committing actions that are self-serving or self-indulgent or self-satisfying. Paul reminds the Corinthian church that they are all part of the body of Christ. And so are we. In Christ, we no longer belong to ourselves. We belong to God. And how we use our bodies or what we do with our bodies reflects our allegiances. Are we beholden to Christ – do we use our physicality in service to others or for creating beauty or for doing meaningful work? Are we willing to stand alongside others in the pursuit of justice? For those of us with white skin, can we utilize our privilege to promote equality for all and be willing to use our ears to listen to the stories of those who have lived their lives under oppression? Can we recognize the gifts and contributions of those whose bodies are differently abled or do we instead focus on perceived limitations?

In Christ we are now part of a community with a larger purpose. This is not to say that we have to completely ignore our own wants and desires. We can live full lives and pursue our interests and enjoy that goodness of this creation. What is different is that we want those things for all people. I know that that seems like a far-off dream, so why not just live in our own little bubbles, taking what pleasure we can. Eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die. For some that seems like the ultimate freedom. But that is not freedom in Christ.

In Christ our focus is on the good of the whole community, paying particular attention to those who exist on the margins or those who fall through the cracks. In Christ we exhibit unconditional love for our neighbors, and we pray for our enemies. We seek reconciliation where relationships have faltered and forgiveness when our actions or words have hurt others. Freedom in Christ is something for which we continue to strive. It is not a one and done, rather it is a way of life. Come, friends, let us pursue this freedom in Christ together.