

Good morning. The first reading is from St. Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter five, verses one through five. Continuing the verse 13-25. What the Messiah has freed us is freedom. Therefore, stand firm and don't let yourselves be tied up again to a yoke of slavery. For, brothers, you are called to be free only. Do not let that freedom become an excuse for allowing your old nature to have its way. For the whole of the Torah is summed up in this one sentence love your neighbor as yourself. But if you go on snapping at each other, tearing each other to pieces, watch out, or you will be destroyed by each other. What I am saying is this run your lives by the ruoch the Spirit, then you will not do what your old nature wants. For the old nature wants what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit wants what is contrary to the old nature. These oppose each other so that you find yourselves unable to carry out your good intentions. But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not in subjugation to the system that results from perverting the Torah into legalism.

And it is perfectly evident what the old nature does. It expresses itself, its sexual immorality, impurity, indecency, in idol worship, in misuse of drugs, in connection with the occult, in feuding, fighting, becoming jealous, getting angry.

In.

Selfish ambition, factionalism, intrigue and envy, and drunkenness orgies and things like these. I warn you now, as I have warned you before, those who do such things will have no share in the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self control. Nothing in the Taras stands against such things. Moreover, those who belong to Mashiah, Yeshua, the Messiah, Jesus, have put their old nature to death on the stake or the cross, along with its passions and desires. Since it is through the Ruoc the Spirit that we have life, let it also be, through the RUOK the Spirit that we order our lives day by day, the word of the Lord. Would you all now please stand for the reading of the Gospel? This is from Luke's gospel. As the time approached for Yeshua to be taken up into heaven, he made his decision to set out for Yerushal M. He sent his messengers ahead of him, who went and enter a village excuse me in Chomran, which is Samaria, to make preparations for him. However, the people there would not let him stay because his destination was Yerushalim.

When the disciples James and John, the Talmudim, Yod, Cove and Yokanon saw this, they said, yeshua, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them? But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village. As they were traveling up the road, a man said to him, I will follow you wherever you go. Yeshua answered him, the foxes have holes, and the birds flying about have nests, but the Son of man has no home of his own. To another, Yeshua said, Follow me. But the man replied, sir, first let me go away and bury my father. Yeshua said, Let the dead bury their own dead. You go and proclaim the kingdom of God. Yet another said, I will follow you, sir, but first let me say goodbye to the people at home. To him, Yeshua said, no one had puts his hand to the plough and keeps looking back. Is fit to serve in the kingdom of God, the word of the Lord.

Except for our young people. We're going to send you off to Kids Alive right now, so let's pray for the kids. Father, we are so grateful for our young people. Lord. We ask that they would learn many things today, and those things that they learn would get into their hearts and also would come out of them in ways that also shape and teach and form us as a body of Christ. So, Lord, we look forward to what you're doing in their lives and through their lives, and bless their teachers. Now, in Jesus name, amen. All right, god bless you all as you go to Kids Alive today, I've asked Clyde Wiley to preach. Clyde is a retired Presbyterian pastor as well as a retired financial advisor. He's bringing a lot of good common sense to us today. But however, as the passage was being read, I saw it's. Such a great passage, Clyde. I think I'm just going to stay up here and preach it myself. No, just kidding. Yeah, that's good. Anyway. Thank you, Clyde.

There was a little boy who had never been to church before. His parents had always put him in the nursery, the preschool, and the first Sunday he was there, he wanted to notice everything. He was curious. And he saw the pastor of the church open a book, and he said to his father, dad, what does that mean? And he said, Son, he's going to read from the word of God. And he saw the pastor, after reading, fold his hands. He said, what does that mean? And he said, Son, it means he's going to ask

God's blessing on the message today. And then he saw the pastor look at his watch, and he said, dad, what does that mean? And his dad said, Absolutely nothing. I'll try to get us out of here before supper. Okay, but let's pray before we delve into this wonderful epistle that Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia. Let's pray together. Oh, Lord, we pray that you will be our teacher, that you will come to us in the power and conviction of the Holy Spirit, that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart and of all of our hearts will be pleasing and acceptable to you, O God, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Just a little bit of background. Patrick did a great job laying this out last week in terms of the letters to the churches of Galatia. These are congregations that were formed from Paul's first missionary journey with his mission partner, Barnabas. The location appears to be in what's now southern Turkey. They were Celtic Gauls, and hence you have the name Galatia for the region because they were Gauls. They were among the early converts from Paul's ministry, the fruit of his ministry, and he and Barnabas had taught them disciples, them trained leaders as people were converted to Christ and established churches. Now, in the early church, churches were probably closer to the size of what we are now because they typically met in homes and the larger homes could handle about 40 to 45 people, including children. So letters were written to smaller churches and then circulated to be read and they were literally just read out loud. Paul's letters are typically very warmhearted, you know, from reading them that he begins with a greeting and then he offers a praise or a thanksgiving, a blessing, and then he gets into his theme. And his themes are discernible from the prayers and the praise and the blessing and the thanksgiving that he offers in the beginning, but not with this letter.

Not with this letter at all. Paul begins very differently. It's probably the first epistle that he wrote about 48 AD. And he wrote it because there were troublemakers who had arrived among the Galatian churches. There were people who had come from Jerusalem who were claiming to be sent from the apostles. But what they were teaching, Paul says, is not even a gospel, though they claimed it was a new gospel because what they were doing is they were trying to subjugate these Gentile believers back into Judaism. They were Gentiles. They were not Jewish. So they would not have called Jesus. Yeshua, they would not have because it wasn't part of their language. But the Judaizers would have wanted them to say that, would have wanted them to use traditional language. They wanted the men twelve and up to be circumcised and all the baby males to be circumcised. They wanted people to observe Jewish calendars that weren't even directly related to the Scripture from the Old Testament. They wanted them to obey the Old Testament Law and particularly have the weight of the decalogue or the Ten Commandments fall on their shoulders. So what Paul is going to point out, it's not in our text today, but this is just background that if they did that, if they subjected themselves to the Law, the Law would serve as a teacher, that they were sinners because we fall short.

None of us keeps it perfectly. In fact, we're very imperfect and sooner or later we're going to be brought up short as we know the Holy Scripture and we study the Decalog. The Law can also be a servant to us once we become people in Christ. But the death of Christ was to free us from our sin and from the consequences of sin, from dying, to raise us again forever and ever, to be with Him, and also to give us another kind of freedom, to free us from a guilty conscience. And Paul sees what's going on and he writes in this letter. Now, when I was about four, my mother dropped me off one morning at the home of Dr. McDonald and his wife. And she had a little boy named Paul who was my very best friend. No relation to the apostle Paul, but Paul and I were best friends. We went to preschool together. My mother had a preschool that she ran, and Paul was my best buddy. And somehow that day, on a winter day when it was cold, he and I slipped out a door, unknown to his mother, into the big fenced backyard.

And we saw something. It was probably early spring, but a little bit cool on the north side of Atlanta. We saw something we had never seen before. We saw a little green tree frog. And we started walking behind it. We were talking about it. I remember it. We were holding hands. We were scared to death of this creature. And it went down into this lower blue terrace, kind of a sky blue terrace that slanted down, and it had this shiny metal stairway or little ladder attached. And we carefully climbed down the ladder and we started walking after this frog until we got to this body of water that was about this deep. We were about here and the floor was going down and the water was coming up. We didn't know that it was a swimming pool. We were four and it was green and covered in algae, fungal. And

we were about to go in to get this frog when all of a sudden we heard this voice that shouted behind us and it said, Paul Clyde, stop. And it was Mrs. McDonald's. And she had raced out of the house to save our lives and she did, or I wouldn't be here today.

This is what Paul does. He starts off his letter and all of a sudden he says, I can't believe what I've heard. I can't believe it. I'm so astonished that so quickly you're turning away from the good news that you heard in Jesus Christ and your salvation in Him to go into slavery under the yoke of the law. I cannot believe it. And the rest of the letter from there on is Paul's representation of the gospel and explaining the two different ways they can go. They can go along the line into bondage of a guilty conscience and living kind of all wrapped up in their sin. Or they can be free in Jesus Christ. And he's going to lay out for them the authentic freedom that comes in Jesus Christ in his holy Spirit and give the readers of this letter in us the two different choices to go either in a yoke of slavery to our sin and guilt. Or to freedom in Christ and the Holy Spirit. That's how he lays it out. Now, when we get to chapter five, and I'm going to read a couple of verses again, just because my translation is a little bit different than the one that was beautifully read, but I'm going to read this to you a little bit differently.

This is from the English Standard version, the ESV, and it's important because of the very first sentence. So I want you to listen carefully to the first sentence. For freedom, Christ has set us free. For freedom, Christ has set us free. So people in the Roman Empire understood slavery. About four years ago, Suzanne and I run a cruise, the only one we've ever done along the Italian coast. We're not cruise-goers generally, and we had one of our daughters, Joanna, with us. And it was a hot day in Rome, so Suzanne laid out the next day when we went to Pompeii and Joanne and I walked the ruins of Pompeii and we were marveling with the tour guide at all of the taverns. They've smoothed off the granite countertops and the holes where they put the bowls for soups, and they explained how they even made kind of a form of a sandwich. And there were public bathhouses where people went for sport and all of this stuff. And the question came up, well, when did the Pompan have time for all of this? Every afternoon. They didn't really work very much. They worked mornings and they took the afternoons off.

How did they do it? Well, they all had slaves. These people in the first century knew slavery. And when someone was set free from slavery, there was a very particular declaration, if you will, an emancipation proclamation that was read over them. That was a message that said, not only is Mark free from slavery, but he is free from slavery for life. And it goes exactly like this. And it's the exact wording that Paul uses for freedom. You have been set free only. He adds in Christ, this is authentic Christian freedom. And he adds this other statement only this stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. They're going to have a choice in terms of how they want to live. This is so relevant to us because there are a lot of believers in Christ, a lot of Christians, a lot of us. Maybe you're like this. I think we've all been this way and been there, and we'll be there again when we've been forgiven of our sins and cleansed at the cross of Christ. We nevertheless walk around carrying broken chains, chains that Christ has broken to free us.

But we still carry them around in our shoulders, wallowing in our guilt that's already been resolved. Now in Jesus Christ, your sins have been forgiven. You've renounced evil at your baptism, and you've turned and faced Christ and you've said, I'm going to take up a cross and follow him. And this is the way it goes, and this is how the letter is laid out. Now we'll move on to verses 13 and 14. I want to make sure that I catch up with my notes. I get where I know my sermon so well that I forget about the notes and don't really care as long as I finish before about 300 today, you'll be happy too, right? Well, maybe you'd like me to finish a little sooner. So versus 13 and 14, he goes on and he says and he really literally says, brethren or brothers and sisters, for you were called to freedom. Brothers and sisters only. Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another. Because one thing that forgiveness and freedom in Christ does not mean is license to do whatever, to just do anything we want.

No, it causes us to a different kind of bondage, if you will, a bondage to Jesus Christ that's expressed in a changed life of loving other people to the point where we become their servants. In Philippians, chapter four, he puts it this or chapter two, he puts it this way put others ahead of yourself. That may mean it's something as simple as you're in the grocery store line, and Tim, you've got a big load of

groceries. You've got ten or twelve items, and there's a woman behind you with a little child, and she's got two items. And even though you're pressed for time, you turn and say, look, why don't you go ahead of me? It can be something very practical. It can also be something very important. We have a good friend who has been afflicted with Louis dementia, which just takes away full body dementia, which takes away everything. And another friend of ours who's about 60 years old, a single woman confided in me not long ago, that two Saturdays a month, she goes and spends the day babysitting our brother so that his wife can get arrest. It's very quiet service.

It's loving one another because we've been transformed in Jesus Christ. And here Paul really kind of goes to lay it out. He says that in fact, Galatians, if you want to embrace the law or the Torah or the decalogue, the Ten Commandments, you need to know this. And he quotes Jesus the entirety of the law is summed up in this one word, that you love your neighbor as you love yourself. You love your neighbor as you love yourself. We've seen this just this week in our country when people have been pouring out on the streets saying, well, I've got to look out for myself. I don't really care about I got to look out for myself. And our country is all about looking out for self. The church stands as a beacon of loving our neighbor, as ourselves, of putting others in front of ourselves, just as our Savior has done for us. Paul then begins to break it down. And by using the word flesh, he does not mean this stuff that's on my skeleton or on yours. It has to do with the whole system by which the world operates. It has to do with our drives, our desires, our motivations.

What gets us up in the morning sends us out to conquer the world. These things that are habitual, though, in the way we treat people. You see, as Patrick pointed out last week, if you adhere to the law, if that's the only thing that you've got, then you become all about performance and you get all into, am I doing it better than Patrick is? My wife, Suzanne, I think she's better at that than me, and I'm jealous of her and the church at Galatia, those congregations were being divided up, arguing about performance, who was holier than the others, who looked more righteous. And the truth is, by just arguing and dividing that way and devouring each other, they were showing how unrighteous and unholy they were. It was tearing them apart and destroying the work that had been done to bring them the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So Paul goes on and he delineates this choice in two different ways to go. The first way is the way of the flesh. He calls it the desires of the flesh or the works of the flesh or the acts of the flesh. It's the way people act out.

And it gives a list of 15. And it's not an exhaustive list, but I'm going to read it to you because they divide up into neat little categories. There are basically four topics here. The first is sexuality immorality, which means adultery and fortification impurity, which means unnatural sex, indecency sensuality, which has to do with orgies and seeking the powers of evil in sexuality. The second realm is religion, having to do with idolatry and sorcery or witchcraft and a fascination with the occult. The third is social, and the list is very long. Hatred, discord or strife, jealousy, outburst of anger or rage, selfish ambition leading to rivalries, quarreling and dissension, dividing into factions, being envious of other people for what they have. And the fourth has to do with self, a lack of self control, drunkenness, wild lifestyles. And Paul says, and more such as these, it's never exhausted. Paul says the works of the flesh are evident to all. I warn you, verse 21. He says, as I warned you before when I was there, that those who do these things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Now, before we go on, let me say something really important Paul is very careful and preachers like to talk about.

The Greek says this and the Greek says that. I remember about the fourth sermon ever preached out of seminary. I had all these Greek definitions. I was going to impress everybody with all the Greek I knew. And at the end of the service, a member of the church came up to me and said, I'd like you to meet my brother. He's a professor of New Testament Greek at Trinity Divinity School in Chicago. And I thought, oh, my goodness, what kind of grade would you give me? And he said, well, you passed, so I'm careful about throwing out Greek words. But Paul uses a word that's very interesting. He says, in terms of those who do these things, he uses the word having to do with habitual, those who make it a habit of doing these things, whose lifestyle is defined by these ungodly characteristics they will never share in the kingdom of God. Now, there are times when all of us dip into these areas, some of them at least, we're okay, because our sins are covered by Jesus Christ. But then he says there's another way to go. And he talks about the real freedom that we have that comes in Jesus Christ.

It is the freedom that is shown by walking in the Spirit. He says, Walk in the spirit. He literally says, Keep in step with the Spirit. I go walking every morning, most mornings, with two old guys. One's just younger than I am, one is a lot older. And the first thing we do every morning on our four mile walk, if we're not feeling well, it's three, is go up what we call geezer hill. Geezer hill, we're geezers. And if you're going to walk up Geyser Hill, it's good for you. But if you walk, you've got to be intentional. You've got to be determined. You have to have a destination. You don't want to just roam aimlessly. And you've got to be persistent. You've got to keep at it day after day after day. And seven times in these few verses, at the end of this text, Paul is going to talk about walking by the Spirit, living in the Spirit, with the Spirit, by the Spirit. But he's going to talk about the Holy Spirit in seven different times. Can you see how important it is? And if you do, he says, instead of these deeds of the flesh that characterize the way you are, you're going to have some other characteristics.

Those other characteristics are mighty familiar. They are the same character traits of Jesus Christ, the very same ones. And he calls them the fruit of the Spirit. They read like this, and I'm going to divide them into triads. I love that. Three groups of three. The first seem to be God word love, joy, peace, the relationship that we have with God, but they spill over to other parts of our lives. The second seem to be directed toward other people forbearance kindness, goodness, being able to stick with somebody long, even when they test our patience. And the third has to do with self control. In fact, they are faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. And as Joe read in Scripture, there is no prohibition in the law of God against any of those traits. The truth of the matter is that these are the fruit of walking by the Spirit. And think about it. Some Christians are like Christmas trees. They just sort of hang ornaments of holiness on their arms. Perfect attendance at Sunday school, perfect attendance at church. I give every week, I do this, I do that. That's not what these are. These come from within.

And for a tree to bear fruit, it's got to be alive on the inside. In other words, when you come to Jesus Christ in faith in Him, you are turning your life over to Him. You are repenting. You're turning away from the deeds of the flesh, and you're turning to Him and following Him. You're walking with Him in a new way. And he promises to put His Holy Spirit in your life, at the very center of your life, and you will bear the fruit of the Spirit. In fact, you could say that the whole goal of the Christian life individually is this to become more and more like Jesus Christ. How do you do it? You walk by the Spirit every day. That may mean getting up a little early in the morning and reading the Bible and offering prayers for the day, bringing your life before Him and yielding that. But Paul also says, if you're going to be that kind of person, he says, you've got to do something else. You've got to crucify the flesh. Remember in Mark, chapter eight, verse 34, Jesus says, if anyone wants to follow Me, he must deny Himself and take up his cross and then come follow me.

In other words, you've got to become like Him. Now, he died for your sins. Your sins have been nailed to the cross. They're done. But he means that day by day, you need to choose to follow Him. A long time ago, I sat in my study as a pastor, and a couple came to me about their marriage, and they were announcing to me the new freedom they had found. They had gone to a marriage counselor about 20 miles away, and he told them the new way to freedom was this, that they were going to practice open marriage. They could stay married, but each one could choose whoever they wanted beyond that. And I said, you know, that's all wrong. And they said, Why? I said, well, because it just absolutely defies what marriage is meant to be. But we got into it. And I said, Listen, at some point you stood in front of Almighty God and a congregation of witnesses, most of them Christian, and you made vows in the name of God that forsaking all others, I take you to be my lawfully wedded spouse, wife, husband. And I said, you know what you did?

You made a declaration that for the rest of your life you would practice Christian penitents every day of your life. You would get up and you would forsake all others and choose each other again. That's what you promised to do. That's when marriage really becomes meaningful. It's when you keep that promise. But to do that, you have to repent every day in the sense of turning afresh to the pathway that you've been given by the Holy Spirit. You need to repent of what you're doing, I said, and you need to come back together and be a couple again and follow Him and be loyal to each other every day and repent of this terrible choice you've made. Well, it didn't work. They had already decided they would go, and the destruction followed. But that's what we're called to do. John Stott, late great pastor, also

church in London, said, if you're going to crucify the flesh, you've got to treat it like this. You have to be ruthless. You've got to realize it's going to be painful and it's got to be decisive. You can't go back to the cross where your sins have been nailed and long for it and wish you could take it down from the cross and somehow loosen the nails and bring it back into your life.

No, he said, you're past the point of negotiation. You've already said in Jesus Christ, it's over. And now I follow him. And I'm living by the Spirit, and you're going to live by the Spirit because that's what your determination is to be. Now, we've provided some help today in the bulletin this morning for the prayers, the morning prayers. There's a prayer that John Scott himself used every day of his life. It's a prayer of trust in the Trinity. When we pray it, it will be our prayer today as a people, but it's also a place, something that you could take home. And I'd encourage you to cut it out if you don't know this prayer and put it in your Bible or hang it on your bathroom mirror and try praying that prayer every day for 30 days and let it become part of your prayer life, because it's a call to worship and to turn and to live by the Holy Spirit. If you do, you will experience the authentic freedom in Jesus Christ. Let us pray. Lord God, we thank you that in Jesus Christ our hearts and our our minds can be set free and that we can live in the Holy Spirit by his power.

O Lord, come and be with us and enable us to do that very thing. We pray in the name of Christ, our Savior. Amen.