

I will follow Jesus
A Sermon by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday June 26, 2022

Galatians 5:1,13-25

This morning as we come to God's word, I want to take a few minutes to look at what our new life in Jesus the Messiah looks like. Jesus claimed, Paul claimed, we claim that the power that raised Jesus from the grave is at work in believers. This is an incredible claim. It means that we have a power to change, and to be changed.

Living the old way, the way of the world, the way we lived before experiencing the work of God in us and for us, is contrasted with living this new, free life that is ours in Jesus.

"Freedom" as Paul is using the word, the way the Bible uses the word, has very little to do with how we think of the word in our day. Freedom today means doing whatever I want, whenever I want, fulfilling my own needs and wants. Paul is very clear that our definition of freedom is really a different kind of slavery. We become slaves to our own desires, and that is not the way of a free Christian life, certainly not the road to abundant life promised in Jesus.

Paul says that our freedom, Christian freedom is to serve one another in love, that is how freedom grows. This sounds a little odd to our ears, but consider it for a moment. Have you ever met someone who is consumed with desires – good or bad... usually there's something good in the desire. They want to be a great musician, they want to be an amazing artist, they want to be happy and comfortable, they want to live in a certain house, they want to have a certain lifestyle, they want to have success at work, or eat great meals, or have lots of friends. Those desires, any of them, when they are the focus and a person decides to go for them, immediately the desire enslaves them, and the greater the desire, the greater the slavery.

Let's think through one example: You want to be an amazing athlete. So you sacrifice for your sport, and train hard, and work hard, it becomes the focus

of your life, other parts of your life are sacrificed. And what if you succeed, when is there enough success, enough recognition, when are you good enough? How hard to you have to work to stay #1? The competition, the pressure, the enslavement never ends. And then who are when you retire? And what if you get injured and can't play anymore? It feels like your life is over. And what if you *never* make it? Are you a failure if you never achieve those goals? Some people think they are.

Does this list describe any driven people you know? Would you characterize them in some of these ways? Are their lives ever filled with **strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, or addictions?**

That's half of Paul's list of what it looks like when we live according to letting our desires rule us. When we live life on our own terms, letting our own desires rule us, even good desires, we find ourselves comparing ourselves to others, always under pressure to succeed on our own, and it leads to bitterness, envy, and other life taking behaviours from that list.

What is the alternative? Paul calls us to new life *in* Jesus that looks *to Jesus* for *who* we are and what our lives are about. The foundation of our lives is knowing that we are loved, forgiven, beloved children of God, complete in Jesus. And then in response to our love of Jesus, and in response to Jesus' unqualified love for us, we are free to love and serve others.

We might love and serve others as an athlete, or an artist, or a musician, or a business person, a mother, or a whatever our gifts and talents can be used for. But the focus is on loving and serving God and others. And I might work to be the best I can be, but it's not out of my desire to prove myself, or succeed. Because I know that I am saved, forgiven, free, beloved and of value and worth already, because I am in Jesus.

And then if problems come, and life is not what I wanted or expected, there is still the fruit of the spirit in my life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,^(H) gentleness, and self-control.

If I can't be an athlete, or I'm not the best musician, I still have value and worth for who I am as a child of God. And I find that God can still use my gifts and talents whether I am sick or healthy, poor or wealthy, unemployed or working.

As I was preparing for today, I learned a few things. One of the things that was pointed out to me is that "fruit" is singular; it was described as being like facets of a diamond. Quickly, let's look at the facets of the fruit that the Spirit produces in us as we live as new creations in Jesus.

Love: *Definition* – To serve a person for their good and intrinsic value, not for what the person brings you.

The Opposite of love is – Fear: self-protection and using people.

Joy: *Definition* – Delight in God and his salvation for sheer beauty and worth of who God is.

Opposite of Joy – Hopelessness, despair.

Counterfeit – Elation that comes with blessings not the Blesser!

Peace: *Definition* – Confidence and rest in the wisdom and sovereignty of God.

Opposite – Anxiety and worry

Patience: *Definition* – Ability to endure trouble (from others or life).

Opposite – Resentment toward God and others.

Kindness: *Definition* – Practical kindness with vulnerability out of deep inner security.

Opposite – Envy. Unable to celebrate the joy of another.

Goodness. (integrity) *Definition* – Honesty, transparency. Being the same in one situation as another.

Opposite – Phoniness; hypocrisy.

Faithfulness: *Definition* – Loyalty. Courage. True to one's word.

Opposite – Opportunist

Gentleness: (humility) Definition – Self-forgetfulness.
Opposite – Superiority: self-absorbed self-aggrandizement.

Self-control Definition – Ability to choose the important thing over the urgent.

Opposite – An impulsive, uncontrolled person.

I look at this list, and I see that the Spirit of God is changing me, but I also see that I have a long way to go.

And Paul tells us how to grow in the fruit of the Spirit and grow in this new life in Christ.

“And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (vs 24)

Those longings, those desires, that tendency in me to want to make it on my own terms, and achieve my own success, and make myself happy and fulfill my own agenda, all of that to be free of it goes to the cross.

Taking to the cross means two things:

1. As I recognize it in myself, I turn away and pray for Jesus' help, forgiveness; I repent.
2. But it also means I cling to the cross, and focus on Jesus and his love for me. When I see the cross, and the length and breadth of his love for me, I am set free again from all that would enslave me.

As I set my eyes and focus on the cross, and on Jesus, the Messiah, the Holy Spirit sets my life in order again, and that resurrection life, abundant life is mine.

Thanks be to God.