

NORTH MAIN SERMON JUNE 29, 2025

Galatians 5:1 states, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." This verse emphasizes that Christ's sacrifice provides believers with freedom from the bondage of sin and the law, and urges them to steadfastly maintain this liberty and resist any temptation to return to a state of slavery.

Galatians 5: 13-25

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^[b] ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever^[c] you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Luke 9:51-62

⁵¹ As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. ⁵² And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; ⁵³ but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. ⁵⁴ When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down

from heaven to destroy them^[a]?” ⁵⁵ But Jesus turned and rebuked them. ⁵⁶ Then he and his disciples went to another village.

⁵⁷ As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

⁵⁸ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

⁵⁹ He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.”

⁶² Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”

THE WORD OF GOD..

Live by the Spirit -- The Cost of Following Jesus

The phrase "Do not be afraid" or "Fear not" appears many times in the Bible but we do not obey it. It is the most under obeyed rule Jesus gave us. How many of us would give up everything to follow Jesus and have no fear? For that matter, how many of us actually live each day without fear. Jesus had moved from obscurity to prominence in a matter of months. News of his miraculous healing had spread throughout the region. Crowds flocked to benefit from his powerful presence. His disciples followed him with enthusiasm. But his fortunes soon began to change. Opposition developed. The crowds got smaller. The zeal of the disciples began to wane. Caesar's reign became more self-evident than God's reign. It was to this background, Luke tells us, that Jesus resolutely "set his face to go to Jerusalem." Why should he spoil success by going to Jerusalem.. this big city..? His strength was in the countryside. But there was no changing his mind. To announce God's reign, he would have to go to the center of earthly power. Jesus based his journey to Jerusalem on the fact that He Knew Who He Was, He Knew Where He Was Going. And he knew who walked with him. Some of the people he met on the road wanted to go with him, but first they needed to bury their dead and say goodbye to their family. But Jesus imparts on a journey that requires all of his focus and strength. He can let nothing detract him from what he needs to do and the goal he needs to fulfill. And he makes that crystal clear!

He basically says if you look back, then you are not fit to go with me. Luke's chapter nine is a pivotal chapter in the story of Jesus' life.... We may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, but does our faith surpass the faith of everything else? Are we willing to trust our lives with Jesus? Are we willing to follow Him regardless of the cost? Are we still afraid to commit as the disciples were? Go back to the beginning of our Gospel reading and we can see that people rejected Jesus, but it did not deter Him from his mission. Jesus has warned the disciples of his impending suffering in Jerusalem but even though they confess their faith in him as Messiah and see him transfigured they cannot begin to imagine the horror of Jesus' last days. But Jesus knows. He has "set his face" toward Jerusalem, meaning unwavering determination. Even when the Samaritans rejected him, he shocks his disciples by barely noticing the Samaritans as he heads to Jerusalem, so concentrated was he on his up-coming destiny. The Samaritan villagers "did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem." Did they reject Jesus, or did they not host him overnight since "his face was set toward Jerusalem"? Jesus uses the occasion to speak about discipleship and about the implications of following him. By now, Jesus is speaking to those who are indeed following him, not to potential followers. He is saying, "Be willing to let go of the past." You bury the dead and move on. There comes a time when you leave the comforts of home, let go and move forward. He knows that his disciples will soon be doing exactly that after he has gone. Their lives will be radically and unexpectedly different than anything they had imagined. They will leave behind what they have known and done and go in totally new directions. By Jesus saying, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" he is saying Anybody who has plowed a field knows you have to watch carefully in front of you to keep the furrows straight. Look backward and you will swerve one way or another. How ironic it is that the disciples did exactly that in the despair and confusion following the crucifixion and resurrection. They looked back and resumed their previous occupation of fishing. It isn't until Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit empowers them, that they begin their true work of spreading the Gospel of Jesus all around the Mediterranean.

These verses jar us into asking, "How are our lives different as followers of Jesus than what they might have been otherwise?" Little did the disciples know that day that they would soon become nomads on this earth, travelling all over, with no fixed home, living in often frightening and hostile circumstances, as followers of their Lord. When we believe in Jesus, we are no longer simply a biological unit on this earth, but a child of the God of the whole universe. Reading this Gospel for today reminds us to ask ..What is God doing in your life

these days? Whether we think of ourselves as aliens, strangers, nomads, or pilgrims on this earth, it is because we follow Jesus, and that often takes us into new ways of living! We're looking for life, remember. We're embracing the new possibilities that are ours in Christ. There are tools to harvest this fruit of the Spirit, and every gardener needs tools to work on the fertile ground. The tools for this labor of sanctifying grace, letting God work in us and through us are called *means of grace*. These are spiritual disciplines, practices that bring us back to the decision point again and take us where God would have us go. John Wesley identified five instituted means of grace, not as exclusive practices, but as ones that help us understand the process of being shaped in faith. His five were prayer, searching the scriptures, Communion, fasting, and gathering in groups to share faith and hold one another accountable. The way to true freedom is by living our faith daily. Paul reminds us that Christian maturity is not only for our benefit. It is to be lived out in community, imitated, and passed on. We need to keep from being distracted. We need to remember that we do not have to give up everything and take the road to Jerusalem. **Jesus uses this encounter along the road to prove the point about the difficulty of discipleship. From the very beginning, because of the way that we are as individuals and societies, we are distracted disciples.** We just need to focus on determination, discipleship, and the need for unwavering commitment to following Jesus. **We will get distracted and veer away and will need the grace of God to pull us back. Thankfully, we have an ultimate, utterly undistracted faithful one who counts us as his own.**

Prayer : Gracious and loving God, we know that obeying your will and doing what is right can be challenging at times or get us into trouble, but as part of this church, we want to live as committed Christians. Give us the power to live according to your Spirit and do the right thing in our lives and as part of this community. Amen.