

FREE SLAVES!



KEYNOTE ADDRESS:
Wyoming District LWML Convention
“It is for Freedom that Christ has set us Free.”
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First of all I would like to thank you for asking me to be with you today and especially at this special event. I know that most of you don’t even know who I am. Hopefully today you will have the chance to get a little better acquainted with me, especially since you are being asked to endure me twice (now and a little later after lunch to talk about campus ministry). I know that your asking me to speak to you today mostly has to do with your love for the campus ministry at St. Andrew’s and your love for the mission of the church in general, and for that I am grateful as are those whom I serve. Many of you have contributed greatly in many ways towards our campus ministry in Laramie over the years, and continue to do so. I continue to marvel at the support of this District towards it’s campus ministry, and in large measure that means that, though perhaps I am not all that acquainted yet with you either, I spend much time thanking God for many of you. I am also thankful to have the chance to speak to you in this keynote address on the theme of this convention, because it is true: *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free,”* (Galatians 5:1)

It won’t be long now and we will be celebrating Independence Day. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the American statesman Patrick Henry uttered the famous phrase, "Give me liberty, or give me death." It became a slogan for the revolution: "Liberty or death." There were no other options. The state motto of New Hampshire, which is on its license plates reads, "Live free or die." They take their freedom seriously in New Hampshire. During the Cold War with communism in the 50's and 60's, the popular slogan was, "Better dead than red." In other words, better dead than to live under the slavery of communism. The loss of liberty is the equivalent to death. And once one tastes freedom they will cling to it and never let go.

How many movies are made which idolize (and perhaps capitalize) on our love for freedom and what it means to be free and what man is willing to give up for that freedom. One fairly recent movie that comes quickly to mind is the Mel Gibson movie, "Braveheart," the Scottish epic depicting one man’s rise to lead his people in the fight for freedom, culminating in his being finally caught and brought before the public

guillotine. When granted one last chance to speak, after having endure great hardship and torture, he simply cries out “F-R-E-E-D-O-M!” just before he is beheaded. I imagine the new movie, “The Patriot” (ironically released just in time for July 4th :-)) is not all that different. Different era; same theme.

Thus we are constantly reminded that freedom is never free! And if this is so in the kingdom of the left, how much more so in the kingdom of the right. Truly, it is either freedom in Christ which brings life, or slavery to sin which brings death. We live free in Christ or we die. As the Apostle Paul writes: “*For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*”(Galatians 5:1) Christ has freed you from sin, from death, from the power of the devil, from the condemnation of the Law. He is the end of the Law. He has freed you by His blood, shed on the cross, and by your Baptism, where He joined you to His death. Now that you are free, guard your freedom closely, and do not submit again to slavery.

Spiritual slavery comes in two forms. There is slavery to the Law. Mixing our works with Christ's work. Trying to merit God's favor by commandment keeping. This is the kind of slavery that says, "Now that you are a Christian, you must keep the Law." In the case of the Galatian churches, it was the idea that Gentile believers now had to be circumcised under the Law of Moses in order to be complete Christians. St. Paul says, "*Absolutely not! If you let yourselves be circumcised in obedience to the law of Moses, then Christ will be of no value to you. He will have died for nothing.*"(Galatians 5:2) If you let any work on your part - no matter how good or pious or religious or holy - intrude on the completed work of Jesus Christ, you will be alienated from Him. You will have fallen from grace. You will again be in slavery under the Law, and the Law will kill you.

***We live free in Christ
or we die.***

You see, every road has two ditches, and the road of freedom to salvation is no exception. The ditch on the right side of the road, which I just described, is the ditch of *legalism* - using the law to get on God's good side. That was the ditch that Luther and the Reformers struggled to steer clear of. While crashing in both ditches can be deadly, that is not the one that most people tend to drive in to today.

Rather, that distinction is reserved for the ditch on the left side of the road, which is called *license*. It's the opposite of legalism. Many a good Lutheran, trying to avoid the ditch of legalism has driven into this one, both in Luther's day and ours. How often do we hear people cry that because we are free in Christ, therefore we are not bound by anything, even God and His Word. *License* is living as if there were no law, using our freedom in Christ to do as we please. That's the ditch St. Paul warns us about when he writes, “*For you were called to freedom, my brothers; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.*”

The freedom that we have in Christ is not a freedom *to* sin but a freedom *from* sin. It is not a freedom to give in to our sinful lusts and desires, but the freedom to resist them, to struggle against them. And it's a constant struggle. There is literally war raging inside of each of us. *For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh. They are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you wish.*

The baptized heart is a spiritual battlefield. There a war rages between our inborn sinfulness and the Holy Spirit. And don't think for a moment that this war is pleasant or easy. War never is. If you want to be comfortably complacent with your sin, then don't be a Christian. Don't get baptized, if you want to be a draft dodger in the war against the sinful nature. When you are baptized you are marked and enlisted in a war. To be a Christian is to literally be at war with yourself.

This means tension and conflict. The sinful nature actively opposes the Spirit. Keeping us from being as holy and righteous and pure as we are by faith in Christ. Crimping our liberty; hindering us from living in

the full freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ. Preventing us from wholeheartedly loving God and our neighbor. We want to do what good, what is right, what pleases God and serves others. But the old Adam in us is always there, holding us back, fouling even our good works with sin, raising doubt and unbelief, driving us to despair and depression, turning us inward into ourselves.

The old Adam has his allies in the war. The world, which makes a lifestyle out of sin and tells you to "follow your heart," even when your heart might be the problem, and may lead you to hell. And the devil, who causes us to doubt God's Word and makes God into some old party-pooper who won't let us do what we want.

Yes there is a war in each of us. The Spirit opposes the sinful nature. They are at odds. That's actually good news for us, though the old Adam in us hates this and wars against it. The Spirit holds us in check, so that sin doesn't have free course in our lives. He protects us from ourselves, so that we don't hurt

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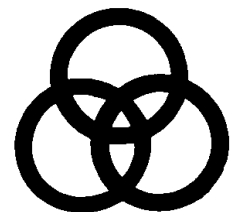
ourselves and others. He convicts us of our sin, he stirs up guilt in us. Guilt is a good thing, a barometer that tells us that something is wrong between God and us, that we are in need of forgiveness. The problem in today's society is that the world is teaching us to not feel guilty about anything, for any reason! But the Spirit shows us that the end of sin is death. The Spirit takes all the fun out of sinning.

That's why I said, if you want to be at peace with your sin and your sinfulness, don't be baptized, don't be a believer in Christ because His freedom, true freedom, freedom from sin, also has a price, and it cuts and it bleeds because it is born of the cross.

Every day in a believer's life is a struggle - the old Adam versus the Holy Spirit. The Small Catechism reminds us that this struggle goes on in the water of Baptism. Daily the old Adam must be drowned and die in repentance, together with all wicked lusts and desires. Daily the new person must rise to renewed faith in Christ to live before God in righteousness and purity. Every day this struggle between flesh and the Spirit, death and life, goes on in the life of the believer. And it will go on until the day we die, because we remain sinner-saints right up to the very end.

But Christ has already won the victory. And unlike any patriot who ever paid the ultimate price of laying down their life, Christ alone has risen from the grave with the freedom that He died for. He bore our sin to death. He nailed it to the tree. Crucified it and buried in the deepest part of the bowels of His earthen grave. He baptized us into His victory. In Baptism we have been crucified with Him. We are dead to the world, dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. The outcome of the struggle is assured. We fight and we struggle as people who know that the victory is secure, Jesus Christ has won! He has conquered sin and death by dying and rising! And now He wants to conquer sin and death in you. Yet in you a war is being fought.

But we are not slaves to sin. The Holy Spirit, the Son, the Father are with you, fighting for you in the power of Jesus' blood. And you have the divine ammunition to defend your freedom - Baptism, Confession and Absolution, the Body and Blood of Christ, prayer, the Word of God. Use them to defend your blood-bought freedom. They are things worth fighting and dying for. And many have.



Sin is serious. Deadly serious. Sin is slavery, the loss of our freedom. "Anyone who sins is a slave to sin." When we obey the urge to sin, we are no longer free. We are back in slavery. But God's desire is that you be free. He's paid for your freedom and provided the means for you to remain in it. He has given you a Church paved by the blood of His Son, built on the foundation of the prophets, apostles and evangelists, and raised and sealed through the blood of many saints and martyrs. And even



though the world won't pay money to see movies about them, our Triune God has preserved the Church through their fight to retain the freedom of the Gospel. Those who have died, those who have risked it all, those who have left their families, those who have left their homes, that they might bear witness to the fact that nothing is more important and more priceless than the pure teaching of God's Word and the proper administration of the Sacraments. They have done so not for their sake only, but also for yours, that you may know the truth, because it really is the truth that will set you free! (John 8:32)

Our being free is all about our being in Christ through faith. And so this freedom gets to the central core of what it means to be a Christian, and therefore what it means to be a Lutheran. And that is why we can

never stop holding up the doctrine of justification though the world hates us for it and other Christians forsake it - because it is the doctrine (the flag) of freedom. The Reformation was a fight for freedom!

In the movie "Martin Luther: Heretic," there is a wonderful scene, in which, at a pivotal point in Luther's grappling with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he is being questioned by his students on how man is saved. At the core of the scene is the age old question: Well, if I am saved by faith and not by works, then I can do what I want right?! (That's the *license* ditch!) It goes something like this:

(student = regular; Luther = caps) "Man can do nothing about his sinfulness?" YES! "God must do everything?" YES! "Then I can do as much as I please, sin as much as I want, it makes no difference? YES, YOU MAY DO AS YOU PLEASE. NOW TELL ME, WHAT PLEASURES YOU?" "Sir, I don't understand!" IMAGINE- WHAT IF THERE WERE NO MORE LAWS, NO MORE PUNISHMENTS, WHAT WOULD YOU DO...DRINK YOURSELF SENSELESS, MAKE FACES AT THE DUKE, SPEND THE REST OF THE WEEK IN THE WHOREHOUSE? YOU SAY TO ME, "I MAY DO AS I PLEASE," I SAY TO YOU, WHAT YOU DO COMES FROM WHAT YOU ARE, WHAT YOU ARE IN YOUR HEART.

"But sir, we are taught do good works. The Scriptures say, "Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire, wherefore by their fruit you shall know them." OH, IS IT THE APPLES THAT MAKE THE APPLE TREE, I THOUGHT IT WAS THE APPLE TREE THAT MADE THE APPLES. "A GOOD TREE CAN NOT BRING FORTH EVIL FRUIT." THAT IS THE LINE BEFORE THE ONE YOU GAVE ME.

IF YOU ARE A GOOD MAN YOU WILL DO GOOD WORKS, NOT TO PROVE ANYTHING, BUT JUST BECAUSE THAT'S HOW YOU ARE, HOW YOU ARE IN YOUR HEART. "Then what does it take to be a good man?" FAITH! "Sir, every German peasant has faith? SO? "Are you saying that heaven will be filled with German peasants? MAYBE? "It can't be that easy." YOU THINK FAITH IS EASY?

This same question was raised 14 centuries earlier in Rome, where some had questioned Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone because they felt it would lead to moral irresponsibility (i.e. But if we are saved by grace and not by works then we can do whatever we want) You see, mankind has always had trouble distinguishing between justification and sanctification, between "what makes us righteous" with "what we are enabled to do because we have been made righteous." As sinful men and women, we have a tendency to think that it really is the apples that make the apple tree.

"YES, YOU MAY DO AS YOU PLEASE. NOW TELL ME, WHAT PLEASURES YOU?"

Paul answered these objections by the church at Rome by speaking of the notion of slavery. He says, *“For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*(Romans 6:20-23)

Paul says that we are slaves and we always remain as such. The question is not whether we are enslaved, but who we are enslaved to. Now a slave is defined as “a human being who is owned as property by another and is absolutely subject to his will,” or “a person who is completely dominated by some

We needed help from outside ourselves, for slaves cannot by nature free themselves.

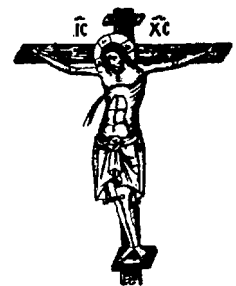
influence, habit, or person.”(Webster’s) Every slave has a master, and we are all slaves. The question is “Who is your master?” As Jesus reminds us *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.”* (Matthew 6:24)

When Adam and Eve sinned they became slaves of that which was against God’s will, and they became indebted in serving a master other than the true God. Indeed, the wages of their sin, and all who would follow them was death. Like a master, “the sin” pays wages, namely this sin power that entered the world by the one act of Adam and by that one act of his enslaved us all, pays its wages in death.

Now it is interesting that Paul uses the word “wages” here because we don’t normally think of slaves as earning wages. But Paul uses this term “wages” because the death earned for all of us by Adam’s first sin is not paid out to us in full until we come to the end of our career as slaves *“of the sin.”* But why don’t we receive the wages of the sin immediately? One reason: It is delayed to furnish us the opportunity to die to the sin, to escape its power and the payment of these wages.

What Adam really earned for all mankind was a penalty. Wages are something good which one longs to receive; death is anything but that. Yet because it was earned for us it is in this sense our wages. And as sinners, we give evidence to what Adam has earned for us, the wages of which is death. On the other hand, our new relation to God as slaves of Christ is the evidence and the proof that we have escaped from Adam’s sin and from the payment earned for us.

And this took place through Jesus Christ, the new Adam, who said *“Instead whoever among you wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”* (Matthew 20:26-28) Christ effected our release at Calvary. He secured our emancipation there. You see, you dear sisters in Christ, were bought at a price, the wages of death have already been paid on your behalf, but the death in you still has to occur for them to be awarded to you.



And this, your transaction of freedom took place in Holy Baptism, where you were transferred from one slave kingdom to another. Holy Baptism is where the death earned for us has already occurred. For as Paul has just gotten done telling the



Romans a few verses earlier in words recited at the beginning of our funeral rite: *“We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin- because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.”* (Romans 6:4-7)

This is our freedom! This is why God delayed to pay the wages of death which we each deserve. This is why Christ came, this is why Christ died, this is why Christ rose, so that each of us might yet confess:

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death,

But how are we to respond to such freedom from slavery? Well, as we continue...

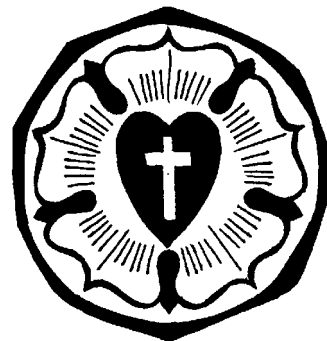
"that I may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness."

You see, a believing Christian is free from sin through faith in God, and yet bound by love to serve his (or her) neighbor. We are free to serve. As Paul says: *"None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord."* (Romans 14:7-8) Perhaps Luther describes this freedom of the Christian best when he says:

"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all." (AE 31:344)... "Insofar as he is freed he does no works, but insofar as he is a servant he does all kinds of works." (AE 31:358)

Yes, we are slaves, but in Christ, we are "free" slaves. By joining ourselves with Paul in considering ourselves slaves for Christ, we bear much fruit as His workers indebted with gratitude, for as we also confess, "For all this it is my duty to thanks and praise, serve and obey Him." That is your freedom ladies, that you can serve Christ, freely through the various vocations He has given you (as mother, sister, wife, daughter, employee, neighbor) not because you must, but because that is the desire of your heart. It is all about the heart! For where your heart is right with God, fruit will freely abound. Again, Luther:

Behold, from faith thus flows forth love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing and free mind that serves one's neighbor willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, of praise or blame, of gain or loss. For a man does not serve that he may put men under obligations. He does not distinguish between friends and enemies or anticipate their thankfulness or unthankfulness, but he most freely and most willingly spends himself and all that he has, whether he wastes all on the thankless or whether he gains reward. (AE 31:367)



And so we are slaves, but slaves who can not help but serve our Master in the freedom which He has given us and by which we were released, just as Paul himself considered himself an ambassador in chains. (Ephesians 6:20)

Every cause for freedom has a great battle hymn, and as a Reformation people we are no different, for as free slaves who live in faith under the flag of freedom – the doctrine of justification - we cannot help but sing:

Salvation unto Us Has Come
By God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom,
They help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,

Who did for all the world atone;
He is our one redeemer.

Since Christ has full atonement made
And brought to us salvation,
Each Christian therefore may be glad
And build on this foundation.
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead,
Your death is now my life indeed,
For you have paid my ransom.

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
With love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
Works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living.
(LW #355:1,4-6)

Dear sisters in Christ, a Christian lives not in him or herself, but in Christ and his (or her) neighbor. In Christ, we realize “YES, I MAY DO AS I PLEASE, BUT WHAT NOW PLEASES ME IS WHAT PLEASES CHRIST! And this freedom, as we also confess, is most certainly true! Glory, glory, hallelujah!

+ *Soli Deo Gloria* +