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Title: Seeing Freedom Through the Eyes of God

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Scripture: [Galatians 5:13-18, 22-25](#)

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The phone call came from a friend who is recent in a new call, someone who worked with me while he was in seminary a few years ago. We caught up for a minute, checked in on one another and he said, "I've got a question." "You realize the 4th of July is on a Sunday this year, what do I do with that?"

This Sunday, especially when it falls on the 4th of July, is always a tricky one for preachers and worship leaders. In the United States, Independence Day is our major national holiday, and for many people, it's their favorite holiday of the year. We look forward to celebrating this day every year and we especially like when it falls on a weekend and we get extra days to celebrate. Here is where the tension comes in for preachers and worship leaders; it's not a day that is recognized as a church holiday. It's not one of those days we think about as a religious celebration like Christmas, Easter, or Pentecost. As followers of Jesus Christ, our ultimate citizenship does not lie with any one nation or country, rather it lies in the kingdom of God. So, you see, why this is a tricky day in the life of the church.

This is a good time for us to explore the biblical idea of freedom and what true freedom is in our lives and the world. We are going to look at a portion of Paul's letter to the church at Galatia, where he addresses freedom. Much of Paul's writing wrestles with freedom and what it means to be truly free, truly free in Christ. He writes about this idea of liberation and how liberation comes to every one of us. He starts with this:

"You were called to freedom, brothers, and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses but serve each other through love." Galatians 5:13 (CEB)

When the continental Congress declared the separation of the colonies from Great Britain 245 years ago, freedom along with liberty, was foremost of the minds of our nation's leaders. This idea of freedom and liberty did not

originate with them. In all time and most places across human history, human beings, as the inscription on the statue of liberty reads, yearned to "breathe free." We hear this in the biblical story when Moses says to Pharaoh, who is holding the Hebrew people in captivity and slavery, "the Lord says, let my people go."

God sends Jesus into the world and in his very first sermon he tells the gathered crowd what he has come to do, "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives. . .to let the oppressed go free."

The Gospel, at its core, is a rescue story. The Gospel aims to liberate everyone.

This idea of freedom for all people originates not from any one nation, but the very heart of God.

This church in Galatia and the occasion of Paul's writing to them centers around deep disagreement and a fractured community. Their disagreement centers around what life in Christ looks like and there is a segment of this community that believes that faith should be mostly about the law, what we would recognize today as a list of dos and don'ts. Others believe that the way to true life is not wrapped up in a list of what to do and what not to do, rather they believe a true understanding of the message of Jesus is what leads to true life.

"You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses but serve each other through love. All the Law has been fulfilled in a single statement, Love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you don't get eaten up by each other." Galatians 5:13-15 CEB

During WW 2 there was a battle being waged in the countryside of France, and at the conclusion of the battle, a group of soldiers realized that one of the brothers had lost their life. They wanted to give him a proper burial. One of the soldiers remembered a little town not far from where they were and a little church with a cemetery in that town. So, they wrapped their friend's body up very carefully. They knocked on the door of the church and the priest answered. They wanted to bury him there. He said, sorry only the members of our faith, of our church can be buried here. They were frustrated and it was getting dark, they turned to leave. The priest called out, if you want, you can bury him over there just outside the fence. So, they worked a while and did just that.

In the morning they woke up, their commanding officer told them it was time to move out. Before leaving, they wanted to send their final respects to their friend and visit his grave one last time. They went over to the church, and they looked everywhere, they couldn't find their friend's grave. They went and found the priest and said we can't find our friend's grave anywhere. The priest said I was so troubled last night about your friend, I couldn't sleep. So, I woke up early this morning and got to work. Your friend is now buried with our church members. I moved the fence.

I'd like to think that Jesus came to move the fence. When Paul writes "you" to the Galatians, that is a plural "you." It is about everyone, not just an individual. When he says, you were called to freedom, it's not just "you" rather it is all. God does not rest until all know what it means to be free.

We are each citizen of a particular nation, but as followers of Jesus, even that citizenship is not our highest allegiance. Rather it is our citizenship in the realm of God that is our highest allegiance.

Knowing freedom through the love and grace of Jesus does not take us away from responsibility, it's doesn't mean we are free to do whatever we wish to do, rather it gives us responsibility. We use our freedom to ensure all know the liberation and freedom offered by God.

Use your freedom to serve one another in love, that is how freedom grows. We've already heard the alternative: if you bite and devour one another, then no one will truly be free.

When I was a teenager, one of the things my youth group did was volunteer at the state Special Olympics. We would go and help the organizers and root on the contestants. Something happened there that made an impression on me and that I will never forget. Several of us were gathered around to watch a 50-meter race. The starter's gun fired and off the contestants raced. As they rushed toward the finish line one boy left the track and started running toward his friends standing in the infield. Someone blew his whistle, trying to get the boy to come back to the track, but all to no avail.

Then one of the other competitors noticed, she was in the position to win the race. She stopped just short of the finish line and called out to the boy, "Stop, come back, this is the way." Hearing the voice of her friend the boy stopped and looked. "Come back, this is the way" she called. The boy stood there, confused. His friend, realizing he was confused, left the track, and ran over to him. She linked arms with him and together they ran back to the track and finished the race. They were the last to cross the line but were

greeted by hugs from their fellow competitors and a standing ovation from the crowd.

Paul's wisdom to the church in Galatia is wisdom for us today- if you devour one another, if we fail to see the image of God in all, well then none of us will truly be free.

As children of God and as disciples of Jesus Christ, the truest freedom we can experience comes from the very heart of God. May that gift give us the opportunity to serve others in love.

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