

Third Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/C): Freed to Serve in Love  
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62  
June 25-26, 2022  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

The apostles James and John got the nickname “Sons of Thunder,” probably because of today’s Gospel. Jesus and the disciples have traveled to Samaritan territory to share the Good News, and the Samaritans in a certain place tell them to keep right on going; what Jews have to say is of no interest to them. James and John get mad at the insult (to their rabbi Jesus, and probably to themselves as well), so they ask Jesus, “*Master, do you want us to call a bolt of lightning down out of the sky and incinerate them?*” (Luke 9:54b, *The Message*) Not surprisingly He answers, “Of course not!” (Luke 9:55, *The Message*) In *The Chosen* video series, based on the Gospels, Jesus incredulously asks James and John, “You wanted to use the power of God to bring down fire, to burn these people up?” James responds, “Well, it sounds a lot worse when you say it **that** way.”<sup>1</sup> Actually, it sounds bad **any** way you put it!

Jesus has been teaching His followers, His friends, about God’s love of us, God’s forgiveness of our sins, God’s command that we love God above all else and our neighbors as ourselves. He teaches His disciples that He is among them as one who serves (Luke 22:27). The greatest among them will be those who put others first, tending to the needs of the last, the lost, the least. But James and John aren’t “exactly” on board with all that. Their preference is to use pyrotechnics to exact revenge on people they identify as the enemy! They definitely get a flunking grade for that day of discipleship training ☺. They want to channel divine power to punish. Jesus wants them to channel Heaven’s power to heal.

In the letter to the Galatians we hear this weekend, St. Paul talks about Jesus freeing us **from** our sin **for** something else. Paul cautions us that we shouldn’t “*submit again to a yoke of slavery.*” (Gal. 5:1c) In the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman empire, prisoners of war were forced to wear an oxen yoke to signify their capture, their subjugation, their desperate and total lack of self-direction, their open-ended captivity. It’s a gripping image and reminds us **not to lightly let go** of our holy liberation, not to unthinkingly dirty ourselves again after the baptismal washing away of sin, not to lose sight of the drowning of the old self

and our rebirth as a new creation in Christ. We sang last weekend, Holy Trinity weekend, about the yoke from which Christ has freed us:

Come, speak aloud of Trinity, as wind and tongues of flame  
 set people free at Pentecost to tell the Savior's name.  
**We know the yoke of sin and death, our necks have worn it smooth;**  
 go tell the world of weight and woe that we are free to move!<sup>2</sup>

Paul describes the old life of slavery to sin into which it is easy to backslide when we serve self instead of Savior. Here's the paraphrase from *The Message*:

<sup>19</sup>*It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness;*

<sup>20</sup>*trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits;*

<sup>21</sup>*the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community. I could go on. This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.*

None of that is true freedom, of course. It's enslavement to self-gratification; it's powerlessness to rein in emotion or to exert any type of self-discipline; it's abandonment of the Gospel and it's outright worship of false gods. Paul writes:

*...you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence [like hurling thunderbolts in anger], but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:13-14)*

In loving our neighbor we will be Christ-like. We will shine brightly with the light of Christ, as Raelynn Kimberly and Hazel Jean are called to do this weekend. Evie will light the baptismal taper from the Paschal candle, hold it before each child, and recite this verse from the Sermon on the Mount: *"Let your light so shine before others that they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."* (Matt. 5:16)

This weekend's lesson from Galatians describes the fruit our lives will bear if we stay grafted onto Christ the Vine:

*<sup>22</sup>... what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard - things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, <sup>23</sup>not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely. (Galatians 5, The Message)*

We are freed to make the choices Christ would make. We are freed to suspend judgment of those who make different choices than ours. We are freed to forgive those who consciously or inadvertently hurt us by **their** choices. We are freed to forgive ourselves for the choices **we** have made that have directly or indirectly hurt others. We are freed to live in the freedom of the children of God.

Scripture speaks of a marriage between Christ and His Church. Christ takes on what is the Church's and grants the Church what is His. It's called the Great Exchange. Our Savior takes on our deathward ways and grants us life. He takes on our sin and grants us forgiveness. He assumes our poverty and makes us rich. He absorbs our sorrow and gives us joy. In giving us what is His, our Lord Jesus shares with us, with Raelynn Kimberly, with Hazel Jean, His kingship and His priesthood. In Holy Baptism we are not only freed from the yoke of sin, we become royalty, anointed with fragrant chrism as kings and queens are, gifted with the Holy Spirit, aware that our election is for the sake of the world rather than for personal privilege. In Holy Baptism we also join the universal priesthood of all believers. Our priestly identity sets us apart to pray for, to intercede for God's children and God's creation, and to preach the Gospel, if necessary using words. In Holy Baptism we receive our working papers to love others as Christ loves us, channeling Heaven's grace to heal. Amen

<sup>1</sup>*The Chosen*, Season 2, Episode 1, "Thunder."

<sup>2</sup>"Come, Join the Dance of Trinity" (text by Richard Leach), ELW #412.

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham