

Third Sunday after Pentecost; June 29th, 2014

Romans 6:11-14, 19-23; John 21:15-19

This sermon was preached by Pastor Jim Page

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, grace and peace be with you all.

We are coming upon the Fourth of July and all that it entails: grilling; red, white and blue and celebration of the American Dream and all the freedom we have.

There is a dark underside of the American Dream and it is: “I can do what I want, when I want, with whom I want” and we tag on this ending: as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone.

This phrase takes on a different meaning at various stages of life. Teenagers simply want to do their own thing while depending on mom and dad, college is a time when young men and women are away from mom and dad and can do whatever they want, even in middle age-this phrase still holds true. In late 40’s and early 50’s, some want to go back and be teenagers again.

At times, I struggle with that sentiment “I can do what I want, when I want”. But I’m sure you’ve never had such a thought come in your mind, right? It could be something simple: At the end of a long work week, you arrive home from work and you want to do what you want-to just relax rather than bother with those dirty dishes. Or it could be complex: You know of couples who are not being faithful to their wedding vows; they are doing what they want; affairs and divorce are more and more common-in your eyes, the sanctity of marriage is under attack. The good news is that we are not the first people to struggle with this. The people in Jesus’ day did as well and the Apostle Paul wrote about it in his letter to the Romans.

Since there is the challenge in how do we live with this phrase/sentiment as Christians? Today we’ll be addressing the implications of this phrase with words from the apostle Paul as our guide, My hope is that we’ll see how important it is to live under God’s guidance from which we receive amazing blessings while blessing others.

The apostle Paul wrote most of the New Testament. His writings were either to a congregation he started or to a person he converted. The only exception was his letter to the Romans. By writing to the Romans, Paul was attempting to address disagreements about Christ’s teaching among Christians in Rome. Regarding this important letter, Martin Luther wrote: “This epistle is really the chief part of the New Testament, and is truly the purest gospel...It is a bright light, almost sufficient to illuminate the entire Holy Scriptures.”

One of those disagreements was about grace. Grace was new to many since they had previously lived by believing that the more good things they did, or rules they followed, would lead to blessings from their gods. If they did something wrong, they would be punished by such things as a sickness. Grace was completely different since rather than doing more good things to make amends with God over a wrongdoing, grace whips the slate clean. Grace was the teaching that by confessing a wrong-God will forgive and you can live life anew.

You can imagine how this new teaching could be the floodgates to freedom. People thought: “There are things I shouldn’t do. But if I confess my sins to God, and God forgives me. All guilt is removed. I won’t be punished. I can do what I want, when I want, with whom I want.”

Paul learned of this and he wrote about Jesus’ death overcoming sin and God giving us the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. It is that gift that leads Christians to live differently. Paul writes: “What then?

Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" (Romans 15-16)

What was happening was that these first followers of Christ were living under "I can do what I want to do, when I want" and three things happened: they 1) abandoned God, 2) Followed the people around them and 3) Lost their freedom.

Lose of freedom refers to that period when we are doing what we want to do when we want to do that until we realize our lives are not where we want them to be. We're bound or hindered by something we've chosen. The Christians in Rome did it and we do it as well: simply trade one king for another.

This is a huge lesson here because all of us have our own story. You may have grown up in the church even being in worship nearly every Sunday; you knew right from wrong; you even knew the common Bible stories. Or you grew up in a good home. Some point along the way you decided that, "I want to do what I want to do." I want to live my own life. I don't need a king or certainly a God telling me what to do.

All of us were created to be ruled over. When we say no to one king, we always choose a different king.

For example, these are the kings we choose:

Appetite-God I'm tired of being a failure, of dealing with this temptation and we consume.

Insecurity-go along with the crowd even if what they are doing is a compromise of your Christian beliefs.

Fear. Comparison-what do others have, what are they doing and how can we keep up.

Lust. Greed. Family history. Let's look at family history for a moment.

Family history is unique. Pastors get connected with many individuals and families and we learn a lot. Some people have a goal and that is: I will not be like my mom and dad. My family will not be like my family of origin. History will not repeat itself. Then at some point they abandon God. When a man or woman intentionally or accidentally turn their back on God, your family history will repeat itself. Your best bet in breaking the chain of your family history is not "Doing what you want when you want" since that is how your family history that you want to undue started. If you do the same thing, history will repeat itself.

God loves you. God understands the power of forgiveness to break the chains of the past. God wants the best for you, your kids and grandkids.

The other kings tempt us to say "I won't!" I won't do that. I won't live under a budget. I won't be faithful. That is then tragically replaced by "I can't." I can't back out of this. I can't stop. I can't live under this budget. I can't get my family back.

Why is it easier to say no to 'God' then it is to say 'no' to the others things we substitute for God?

Paul knew of this struggle and his good news back then still holds true today and that is that the greatest freedom is found under God's authority. To make it easy to remember: Let freedom ring with God as king. God wants to love you and have you love him back. God takes people back regardless of how far they have gone away from him. We worship a God whose grace extends to all people regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender or their past.

Placing God as your king will, I promise you, be a blessing to you, your family and our world in ways you will see and not see. It is God's grace that doesn't free us to "Do what we want when we want to". God's grace is the matchless gift of forgiveness, hope and new life that only the God who loves you can provide.

Imagine what would happen if the "I can do what I want when I want" was removed from people's thinking and God's authority was followed? How would families, work places, neighborhoods, and the needs of our world be changed? How would churches be changed?

You have an opportunity every day to place God as your king. Will you live to 'Do what you want when you want' or will you live with God as your king? The greatest freedom is under God's authority. With that freedom are tremendous blessings for you, your family and God's world. Amen.