

Pastor Brian's
Mid Week Message
July 1, 2020

"FREEDOM"

"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." Galatians 5:1

This Saturday is the 4th of July, Independence Day, in which we celebrate our liberty from the tyranny of the King of England won in the Revolutionary War and stated in the Declaration of Independence. We celebrate our freedoms as a sovereign nation and the individual liberties that are accorded to us as its citizens. Our observance of this very special holiday will take place within circumstances that none of us have ever experienced before, that of a pandemic called Covid-19. We've seen in that past couple of weeks a surge in cases as our society has reopened from the shutdowns originally imposed to control this virus. Our liberties were severely restricted in the name of "flattening the curve" in order that our medical system not be overwhelmed. Over the past two months those freedoms have been gradually restored. It's how we exercise our freedoms that I want to address today, both as citizens of this country, the United States of America, and as citizens of the Kingdom of God in Christ Jesus. The Word of God gives clear direction in both areas. Let's start with our responsibility to live peacefully as citizens of our nation. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 13:1, *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* Martin Luther refers to the civil realm as "God's Kingdom of Power". God rules the entire world, the universe, and all people in it by the means of the Law. He gives rulers and authorities power over the people to promote peace, justice, and harmony. These rulers are accountable to him as for how they use this power. Christians are called like everybody else to follow the laws and edicts of the government, if it is not contrary to God's Law. At the same time, we are citizens of "God's Kingdom of Grace" through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. In this kingdom we are set free from the demands of the Law as the Kingdom of Grace is ruled by the Gospel in which we are set free by the truth, that is by Christ Himself. The Gospel releases us from the power of sin, death and hell to freely live out our faith. That means that in terms of that which is neither required by or forbidden by Scripture we are free to choose for ourselves what is good and right. But, and this is a BIG but, we do not do this in a "personal vacuum", as everything we do can and will have impacts on those around us...our neighbors. To that Paul says, *"I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died."* (Romans 14:14-15) What Paul means here is that indeed we have great freedom, but also that in exercising our Christian liberties, as well as our civil liberties, we are never to do anything that is a stumbling block to the faith of our brothers and sisters, or a detriment of those around us. All of this I want to put into the context of our present environment...with a deadly virus circulating among us. We are free to do as we see fit in those things that are neither commanded or forbidden by our laws, Christian and civil, but right now the proper exercise of these freedoms is critical. Our state government, through the Department of Health, strongly recommends we do the following. 1) Social distance, 2) Wear masks where social distancing is not possible, 3) that social and recreational gatherings do not exceed 50 people, and 4) that vulnerable people limit personal interactions outside the home. The recent spike in the positive test in the state and nation call for us to pay closer attention to all of this. Here at Trinity Lutheran Church of SW Florida social distancing is not something that we are prone to do. We are a close knit, loving, hugging fellowship. I see that we have some choice in the matter, either to commit to it, or to seriously consider using masks to protect others from being exposed to the virus through us. Most of us that gather aren't afraid of getting it ourselves, but we certainly don't want to put others at risk. I am not saying that we must wear masks in worship and other events here at the church, but I do ask you to consider what is the "right thing" for each of us to do going forward. The Board of Elders will be taking this all up in our meeting this coming Tuesday. What's most important here is that God's will be done, not necessarily our own. We pray that petition every Sunday in the Lord's prayer. I certainly welcome all of your comments, concerns and questions in this matter, and look forward to the day when all of this is behind us and we can be gathered together as we all desire to do. Lord, I pray that day comes quickly, according to Your good and perfect timing and will.