

“Use Your Freedom Responsibly”

Tomorrow we observe another Memorial Day. Memorial Day is an opportunity for us to remember the almost 1.2 million brave men and women who gave the ultimate sacrifice of their lives in military service to our country since 1775 A.D. in order to provide us with the freedom that we enjoy as citizens of the United States of America. Their sacrifice is an important reminder that earthly freedom doesn't come cheap! Every day we have the opportunity to remember our Savior, Jesus, who gave the ultimate sacrifice of his life 2000 years ago in order to provide us with the spiritual and eternal freedom that we enjoy as citizens of God's Kingdom. Jesus sacrifice is the ultimate reminder that spiritual and eternal freedom doesn't come cheap! Earthly, spiritual, and eternal freedom are all wonderful blessings from God. But every good and perfect gift that God gives, including freedom, the Devil and the rest of the demons tempt us to abuse in various ways. Our Scripture lessons for today encourage us to use our freedom responsibly.

In our Old Testament lesson for today we are reminded of the freedom that we have to gather with fellow Christians on a weekly basis to praise God with our repentance, our songs, our prayers, our financial offerings, our eager listening to the Word of God, our proper use of the Sacraments, and our encouraging support of each other through the conversations and relationship building that takes place here. Yet we are tempted regularly to abuse our third commandment freedom.

- We are tempted to think that the third commandment, which commands us to take time to rest our souls, is restrictive and interferes with our work schedule, our sports schedule, our social schedule, our relaxation schedule.
- We are tempted to think that the third commandment is like punching the time clock at work or getting marked present at school. As long as we are physically present and going through the motions, it doesn't matter if our head and heart are into it. God will give us credit for being in attendance.
- We are tempted to think that nothing is missing from our third commandment obedience when I could gather with my fellow Christians, but I choose not to because it's more convenient to watch at home.
- We are tempted to think that the third commandment, which commands us to take time to rest our bodies, is restrictive and interferes with our work schedule, our sports schedule, and our social schedule.
- We are tempted to think that the third commandment, which commands us to take time to rest our bodies, is an excuse for laziness.

We are tempted to and do abuse the freedom that God provides through the third commandment in all these ways and more. And the reason we do this is because we have this mistaken idea that the third commandment is what we do to keep God happy. Jesus sets us straight in the Gospel lesson when he says this **“The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”** (Mark 2:27). The word “Sabbath” means rest. God established time for rest for YOU and ME, not himself. In love God knew that our lives on earth, our relationship with God, and our eternal future would go better if each of us takes time for rest of the body and rest of the soul on a weekly basis. We use our freedom responsibly when we remember that and act accordingly.

In our New Testament lesson for today the Apostle Paul articulately reminds us of the freedom we enjoy through our connection to Jesus through faith. The fact that each of us has been chosen by God to be his

child and follower is an act of God's "mercy" (2 Corinthians 4:1). Through faith in Jesus each of our hearts contains the "treasure" (2 Corinthians 4:7) of the Gospel. We have been freed from spending eternity in Hell. We have been freed to spend eternity in Heaven. We are free to live each day on earth enjoying the peace of God's forgiveness and a clear conscience. We are free to live each day unafraid of death because we know that Jesus will raise us back to life. We are free to show this is our greatest treasure as we live a Christian life and share this good news with others. Yet we are tempted regularly to abuse our Gospel freedom.

- We are tempted to think that we can embrace anti-Christian worldviews and behaviors and yet still be considered a Christian.
- We are tempted to think that our greatest treasure is the things and the experiences and the people of this world rather than our relationship with our Savior God and the eternal pleasures in Heaven he has waiting for us.
- We are tempted to think that my repentant struggles with sin are too great to be forgiven by God, so I have to live my life with a guilty conscience.
- We are tempted to think that the persecution that I face or could potentially face for being a Christian on earth is not a worthwhile sacrifice to make, so being silent about my Christian faith is the best policy.
- We are tempted to think that the hardships I have to deal with on earth give me the right to "lose heart" (2 Corinthians 4:1) and mope around acting as God never did anything good for me, that Heaven isn't real, and that the resurrection from the dead is a hoax.
- We are tempted to think that the temporary earthly freedom we enjoy in the United States is a right we are entitled to instead of a gift from God that could be lived without if necessary.
- We are tempted to think that the temporary earthly freedom we enjoy in the United States is a greater treasure than the eternal freedom we enjoy through faith in Jesus.

We abuse the Gospel freedom that God provides through faith in Jesus in all these ways and more.

For many years now, especially over last year, I've heard concerned people lament that the United States is in trouble because certain legislation and behavior is abusing our freedom and threatening to steal our freedom. So how do we stop this abuse? It starts with you doing your best to use your freedom responsibly. Work hard, take care of your family, be a law-abiding caring member of society, pray for our country, vote, speak positively about our country, be appreciative of all the people of the past that made amazing sacrifices so that we can enjoy the life we do in the U.S., and encourage other people to do the same. At the same time, don't overreact to what is going on in our country. The freedom we enjoy is wonderful and we don't want to lose it. Yet, even if we did lose it, life would go on and God would help us survive like so many other people throughout history and in our world today who don't enjoy the freedom we have here in the U.S. And most importantly, use your freedom responsibly as you remember daily the greatest freedom we have had and continues to be supplied by Jesus. Follow Paul's example of what it means to use your Gospel freedom responsibly. **"¹³ It is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵ All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal"** (2 Corinthians 4:13-18). Amen.