

This Sunday's texts:

[Jeremiah 28:5-9](#)

[Romans 7:1-6](#)

[John 14:15-27](#)

A New Way

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The Gospel reading comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, verses 15 to 27:

“If you love Me, keep My commands. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept Him, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see Me anymore, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. Whoever has My commands and keeps them is the one who loves Me. The one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love them and show Myself to them.” Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do You intend to show Yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves Me will obey My teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love Me will not obey My teaching. These words you hear are not My own, they belong to the Father who sent Me.”

This is the reading of His Word. Good morning. For those of you who don't know, I'm Pastor Joe with St Timothy's Lutheran Church. I got my Pastor Joe name tag actually, so that you know I'm allowed to come up here. It is such a joy to be here today. It's a reminder to me that the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is an incredible thing, isn't it? We aren't two churches. We're two congregations. But the Church has a capital "C" and there's one of it that belongs to Jesus. Amen? It is so great to all be worshipping in this place. I guess we probably wouldn't all fit over at Carter. I hope this is not the last time we get to do this together. I suspect the next fifteen minutes are going to have something to do with whether it happens again.

I'm thrilled to be here and today, on this Fourth of July weekend, we're going to talk about freedom. I think it makes sense. Right? We have incredible freedom as Americans. It's right to be grateful and to celebrate that because it's easy to take for granted in this place where we can meet to worship Jesus openly, safely, and without fear. We have brothers and sisters in Christ around the globe for whom the same thing is not true. That right is not available to everybody. There are places like China, North Africa, the Middle East, where that freedom, that safety and security are not available.

The truth is that it isn't a Constitution or a Bill of Rights that determines whether or not you and I are free. It's Christ. John 8:36: "So if the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." So our brothers and sisters in Christ who meet in underground churches in China, who meet secretly in homes in the Middle East, because they are not free to meet and worship openly, are, in fact, as free as you and I are because they are children of God and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdoms of this world will pass away, but the kingdom of heaven doesn't. If the Son says you're free, then you're free indeed.

So today, we get into Romans and we talk about freedom, the freedom we have as Christians. It talks about being set free and released from the old way of the written code, of being set free from the Law, that rigid legalism that demands that you earn and deserve the things that you get in this world and the next. But we live in the new way of the Spirit, set free from legalism and invited into a new way of living that comes as the Holy Spirit of God works in and through us. Paul describes it like this. "By dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the Law, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of written code."¹

So what is the "old way of the written code?" For us to get a feel for this, to dig into this, I want to look at the day of Pentecost. It might not look like an intuitive place to start. Pentecost is recognized by Christians as the day that God pours out His Holy Spirit on His people. And that's true. But there's something I don't think a lot of Christians know is that Pentecost was a Jewish holiday before it was a Christian one. In the Old Testament, it is referred to as the Feast of Weeks. I don't if that doesn't sound as inspiring to you as it does to me. It's called the Feast of Weeks because seven weeks after the Passover, where the blood of the spotless lamb covered the door frames in Egypt so the Angel of Death passed over God's people, and then God led them out of slavery and captivity and into freedom. Seven weeks after that, they arrive at Mount Sinai where they receive the Law from God. So it's called the Feast of Weeks, but in Greek, it's referred to as Pentēkostē which means "fifty." Fifty days after Passover, they came to celebrate Pentecost. In the book of Leviticus, it is actually mandated that all Jewish men who are able will make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to recognize Pentecost.

They celebrate the day that God gave the Law and made a covenant at Mount Sinai with His people, where He gave His instruction, His Torah, instruction in how as God's free people to live, thriving in relationship with one another and

¹ Romans 7:6

with a perfect and holy God who said, “I have delivered you and I am drawing near. I am going to dwell in your midst.”

But the problem that came about from this was not with the Law. God did not mess up when He gave the Law. The problem is the human tendency to legalism, to take a law that was meant to facilitate human flourishing, to facilitate good relationships so that it would go well for them in the Promised Land that they could live in relationship and in proximity to God. The rules became more important than the relationships. By the time of Jesus, this Law that was meant to give life had become something else. It had become a rigid and heavy burden laid on top of God’s people. So much so that by the time of Jesus, Jesus was going about offending the Pharisees by doing horrible things like healing people on the Sabbath. God forbid you break the rules for the sake of healing somebody. The Pharisees were aghast! “How could He do it? What a sinner!” Somewhere Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Woe to you Pharisees, because you give a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.”² They adhered to the Law so rigidly that when they went to give their tithes, they would go out in the garden and say “Twenty leaves on my mint plant; God gets two.” The two big ones. And yet they would walk by the crippled man outside the temple gate with no compassion. The rules became the point. And for the Pharisees, their status before men and God was determined by how well they adhered to these rigid laws and regulations.

And the same phenomenon is at work today in this world we live in. We live in a legalistic culture. One, like the Pharisees, lays heavy burdens on our shoulders and does not lift a finger to help. Your worth is measured by the college you get into, your job, your status. Your correct or incorrect political and ideological alignments determine your status and your worth and your dignity in society. We can quantify our worth in social media likes, grade point averages, and salaries. Perfectionism reigns among us, especially here in Silicon Valley and perfectionism is a horrible tyrant. It takes and it takes and it takes. And it never gives. It’s never satisfied. And many of us live this way. Even Christians. Even in the Church. Under this heavy, heavy burden of the spirit of legalism, breaking ourselves over and over again against the expectation of others, we try to prove ourselves worthy of God’s love and the love of others by the way we live our lives. And it’s all a fantastic adventure in missing the point. That is the old way of the Law.

Then that day of Pentecost comes in Acts, chapter 2. Fifty days after the Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ laid down His life, His blood shed on a cross, so that

² Luke 11:42

we could be forgiven and set free from the slavery to sin. All of God's people are gathered together in Jerusalem, every tribe and tongue gathered to recognize Pentecost, remembering where the Law was given.

Into that space, God does something new. The God who had been pursuing His people with His love, who delivered them from slavery in Egypt, set them free, invited them into relationship with the mighty Creator of the universe, who made His faithful promises with them on Mount Sinai, gave them the Law, said "This is a way to live so you can thrive with one another and with Me. This is a way of giving life to the community, and yet I know you will be unfaithful, but I will never be." The God who makes promises is faithful to them. On that Pentecost day, this faithful God pours out His Holy Spirit.

In Ezekiel 36, the prophet says, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; ... I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws."³ In the Gospel text today, "The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you."⁴ *This* is the new way of the Spirit, that the Holy Spirit comes and dwells inside of us. You see the parallelism. It takes the place of what the written law was supposed to do. So that we're no longer living by the Law, we live in the freedom of the Holy Spirit. We're free from Law, released from the written code, so that perfectionism that is lifeless and loveless has no power in God's people. Amen?

The Spirit leads and guides and teaches, so that we no longer live according to the Law, but rely on the Spirit that dwells inside of us. And we know where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom.

Now this might be the point in the sermon where you might start thinking, "Hey, let's get to the application." How does this apply to my life? Right? The honest answer for you all today is there isn't one. There's no application today.

I often have conversations with college students and young people here at the church, as they're moving into new areas or they finish school and are moving away to start careers. They're wondering how do I find a new church. It's hard leaving the church you love and it's hard to find a new one. So my first piece of advice, my first red flag to look for when you're visiting churches is this. I tell them to be on the lookout for this kind of preaching: "Jesus loves you, so be a better person." That's a bad preacher. Do you know why? Because that's not the Gospel.

³ Ezekiel 36:26-27

⁴ John 14:26

That is the old way of the Law with a nice, new shirt on. That's not the Good News of Jesus Christ.

When we fixate on what I am supposed to do, we run a grave risk. Here is what that risk is. For me, when I start focusing on what I'm supposed to do, I lose track of what God has already promised that He's going to do. When I start thinking about what I do, my expectations are down here because I'm not that great. But when I am focused on what God can do, the possibilities are endless.

So I don't like to think all that much about *application*. What do I do? Rather I like to think about *implication*. If this is true, then what? What if what I'm hearing about God today is the Truth? What does that mean for my life? So what are we hearing that is true from God's Word today? Jesus died for you. That is true. The death of Jesus by His blood shed on the cross, that washes you clean of all of your sin and sets you free, that is true. You are free from the Law and the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you to lead you, guide you, teach you, and empower you. That is true. And so we live in the new way of the Holy Spirit.

So friends, today, I want you to ask yourself a question. What do you think God Himself dwelling and at work in you can do?

I can tell you what I have seen Him do. I've seen Him heal the sick, comfort the mourning. I've seen Him give strength to the weak and courage to the fearful. I've seen swastika tattoos covered by cross tattoos. I've seen peace that transcends all understanding in the middle of the darkest, roughest storms. I've seen people delivered from addiction. I've seen outspoken enemies of the gospel turned into its most faithful witnesses. I've seen hope to the hopeless, signs, miracles, wonders, hearts and lives transformed, bitterness, shame, and guilt wiped away. I've seen new life and new starts, all by the power of the Holy Spirit in God's people.

So as you go today, I want you to make this your prayer. Ask God "What does Your Holy Spirit want to do in my life today, this week, this year, with this decision, with this opportunity? God, what do You want to do in my life?" And see what happens. His Spirit will lead you. It will guide you. It will teach you and remind you of what Jesus said. It will give you the power and the guidance to do God's will and It will bear fruit in your life. God is faithful. His Spirit is powerful. And It's in you.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, You have poured out Your Holy Spirit on Your people. You have called us Your children. You have loved us. In the words of C.S Lewis, "The complement is almost too much to bear." And yet those who humble themselves before You, You lift up. Those who are weak, You make strong. Lord,

You fill us with Your Spirit and You promise to work, to do a new thing, to bring about new, abundant, and eternal life, and so Lord, we relinquish faith in our own abilities and put it wholly in You, because You love us, because You're good and You're faithful. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.