

Sermon Manuscript: 2 Timothy 1:8-14
Our Heritage of Freedom in Christ
6th Sunday after Pentecost – July 4, 2021

So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you — guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. [NIV]

It's Independence Day! What kind of celebration do you have planned? You'll probably get together with friends and family. Maybe you'll barbecue. You might even celebrate with some fireworks. The Fourth of July should be celebrated loudly and joyfully. Freedom is a wonderful thing and it is indeed something to greatly celebrate. John Adams, who was one of the authors of the Declaration of Independence, a founding father and the second President of the United States said this about celebrating our independence: *"It will be celebrated with pump and parade, bonfires and illumination from one end of this continent to the other."* If you think about the things that we do on the Fourth of July, we do a pretty good job of carrying out what Adams suggested. We celebrate freedom. But on a more serious note, do we have what it takes to maintain the freedom that has been passed down to us? When he stepped out of the convention hall where the Constitution had just been adopted, Benjamin Franklin was asked what kind of government we had. He replied, *"A republic, if you can keep it."* Freedom is a wonderful idea but it can be very difficult to hold on to. Thomas Jefferson — also an author of the Declaration and the third president — said this: *"A well-informed citizenry is the best defense against tyranny."* Part of our celebration of Independence Day should also be a determination to be such well-informed citizens. Lincoln said that our government is *"of the people, by the people, for the people."* It is the people's business to be good citizens so that our nation will continue to enjoy gets here teacher freedom.

As the disciples of our Savior Jesus Christ, we have an even greater freedom as our heritage. We also want to always eagerly celebrate that heritage. We want to be careful so that we never lose it. Let us treasure **OUR HERITAGE OF FREEDOM IN CHRIST**. This is Paul's charge to Timothy it is charged to us today as well.

1. Know It

To know the heritage of freedom that we have in Christ is really our job and responsibility as believers in Jesus. Paul took that responsibility very seriously. He was determined to pass the heritage on to Timothy. Paul wrote the second letter to Timothy at the end of his life. Last week we

heard about the great storm that Paul endured as he traveled to Rome to stand before the emperor's court. He was kept under house arrest for a time but finally was acquitted and released. After that, it seems that he made a fourth missionary journey that possibly took him as far west as Spain. But after a couple of years he was accused of being an enemy of the Roman empire by some who opposed his message. He was imprisoned a second time. When he writes this letter, he was facing imminent execution. This letter is a farewell letter to Timothy.

It takes solid knowledge of the heritage of freedom that we have in Christ to be good citizens of Christ's kingdom. Think back to Jefferson's thought about well-informed citizens. What he meant was that such citizens should be able to understand and explain what it means to be a citizen of the United States of America. This is more than simply flag waving and fire crackers. It's understanding how our form of government works and where we fit into it by being responsible and patriotic citizens. It means appreciating my own rights as well as being eager to defend the rights of others.

This holds to be even more true for knowing and understanding our heritage of freedom in Christ. Some years ago a survey was taken among young people asking them what they believed about God. Their answers could be summarized in five points:

1. God exists, he made the world and he watches over people.
2. God wants people to be good as it taught by most religions.
3. The main goal in life is to be happy and feel good about yourself.
4. God doesn't need to be involved in our lives except when he needs to solve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

Such beliefs are not only common among the young people that were surveyed, I think we would all agree that such beliefs are very common among most of our fellow Americans. These beliefs are held by many people who claim to be Christians. But while these things might be partially true, they certainly do not reflect what the Bible teaches us about God and his plan of salvation. These do not reflect true Christianity. Can we say that this is the heritage of freedom that we have in Christ? Hardly!

We need to know the heritage that God has handed down to us from his word. Paul describes it here when he talks about the *"grace given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but now... revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has destroyed death in his broad life and immortality to light through the gospel."* [verses 8-9] It is the heritage of this gospel that we seek to proclaim. We want "just the facts" when it comes to what God has told us about our salvation. Those facts begin with understanding that the whole world has fallen into sin and that we ourselves are all born sinners. From there God has revealed the good news of his undeserved love. He determined to save us from the just punishment of our sin by taking that punishment on himself. On Easter he rose from the dead. In this way he rendered death ineffective. It has been destroyed. Jesus came and fulfilled the plan that God had set before the beginning of time. In this way he has set us free from slavery to sin and the doom of death that follows. The freedom that he has provided for us has given us a new life now and the confidence of an immortal life in heaven.

We celebrate our heritage of freedom in Christ by striving to be faithful to what he has revealed in his word. We keep the truths of our heritage before our eyes, in our mouths and on our minds by regularly making use of a Christian Creeds – the Apostles, Nicene and the Athanasian. We are

careful to do the same as Paul did. In his farewell words to the congregation at Ephesus he described how he maintained the heritage when he said, *"I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God."* [Acts 20:27] Don't take the heritage that has been passed down to us for granted. The freedom we have in Christ and the certainty of it that comes from knowing God's Word is not something that everyone has. Let us make it our business to know it is Paul did and he has urged Timothy.

2. Show It

Paul was called by Christ to proclaim Christ's heritage of freedom. Paul did it both in his words as well as with his life. He tells us here that he was called to be a herald, an apostle and a teacher of that heritage. A herald is someone who announces news. Paul announced the good news of Jesus as the Savior wherever he went. An apostle is someone who is sent out as an official representative of a dignitary. Paul was sent out by God himself to announce the freedom that God had provided to the world through Jesus. A teacher is someone who carefully instructs others in needed knowledge. Paul spent much of his life teaching about Christ and what his work means for us all. His letter still do this for us today! These were the ways that Paul showed the heritage of freedom in Christ through the words that he spoke.

Paul also showed the heritage of his freedom in Christ with his life. Here he tells Timothy, *"What you heard for me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching."* [verse 13] When he wrote to the Philippians, he said, *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice."* [Philippians 4:9] And when he wrote to the Corinthians he had said, *"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."* [1 Corinthians 9:22]

Paul showed the heritage of freedom that he had in Christ both in word and deed even though it led to opposition, persecution, prison and finally death. These troubles came from proclaiming the truth of God. He was able to do it because, as he tells Timothy, he knew who he believed when he counted on Christ to guard his eternal inheritance.

Let us follow the same pattern as Paul. Let us speak, teach and proclaim the good news of Jesus. This means that we will have to speak about sin as well as forgiveness in life. It will be a joy to many. But some may also reject it as well. We may even come under ridicule and persecution sometimes. But let's be sure that we are persecuted for the right reasons. Let it be for showing our heritage of freedom that we have in Christ. Let us show that we were prisoners of death as all people are. But now we have been set free by Christ through God's grace. Let us not reject others in judgment or condemnation but instead strive to lead them to the same freedom that we know. Always show our heritage and our freedom in Christ by being gracious and loving to all. Do it like Paul. Do it like Christ! We were all lost in sin and still are sinners as long as we live in this world. We are all in this together. But then let our invitation be: *"Come into Christ's kingdom of freedom!"* There we know hope. Let us bring it to others.

3. Guard It

Guarding means to keep something safe so that you do not lose it. Paul speaks of the "good deposit" that was entrusted to Timothy. He's talking about the truth of God's word that Timothy had received. Later in the letter Paul will write: *Continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have*

known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [2 Timothy 3:14-15] The heritage that Timothy had received came through his grandmother, his mother and Paul. Paul urges him to guard this by what we might call "regular maintenance." Keep the teaching pure and present through regular use and study. Timothy would be helped by the Holy Spirit that lives in the heart of every believer. The Spirit works through the gospel in the Word when we hear and learn it as well as through the Sacraments as we use them.

So what's your maintenance plan for guarding your heritage of freedom in Christ? Some of you own houses. If you've ever had to replace the roof, you know that they are generally guaranteed for something like 20 years. Once the new roof is installed we tend to forget it. Don't treat your heritage in Christ that way. When was the last time you thoroughly studied your heritage? Was it twenty years ago? Longer? Was the last time you sat in a structured Bible study all the way back when you were confirmation class? That might work for a roof but it doesn't work when our faith is at stake – when it comes under assault every day from the devil, world and our flesh. You would think there would be a clamor for Bible classes so that believers could keep their knowledge and understanding of their heritage fresh and strong. You would think believers would want to know it better and better so they would be able to speak and explain that heritage. Turn to the Spirit's power to guard your heritage.

Not only do we want to guard our heritage for ourselves. We also want to pass it on to others. When Paul says, "guard the good deposit," it makes me think of a safe deposit box. It's a place where we keep important things safe. It has a key so that we can get into it. If you have a safe deposit box, your heirs won't be able to get to your valuable heritage unless they know where to find the key. We have our wonderful heritage of freedom in Christ. Let's be sure others know where to find the key so the heritage can be passed along.

We want to pass it along to other people. But we especially want to pass it down to our next generation. We want our children to have the heritage passed to them as it was passed to us. We do this as parents. We also do it through our school. Immanuel school is almost as old as our congregation. From its founding the people of our congregation have seen the importance of a school as a way that God gives us to pass on our heritage of Christ and the freedom he gives. Our school's purpose is to entrust the good deposit to the next generation that comes after us. It's for our own children but also for others whom God might send us as well. May God grant us the ability to continue to pass down Christ in this way.

We will be celebrating our freedom as a nation this weekend. It's worthy of celebration because of the many wonderful freedoms God has given us in the United States. But even more so and more often let us celebrate the heritage of our freedom in Christ. Let us grow in our knowledge of how that freedom came to be ours through Christ. Let us show our freedom in a life of love and joy. And may God always guard our heritage of freedom in Christ by maintaining it in ourselves and in others.

Remember and live the words of that familiar hymn, "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage..."

*God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way;
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant,
while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure.
Throughout all generations. Amen.*