



Epiphany 5-February 7, 2021  
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish  
1 Corinthians 9:16-23 and Mark 1:29-39

## “Free and Slave”

- Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*The Freedom of a Christian was the third of three treatises or essays that Martin Luther wrote over 500 years ago in 1520. The first two sentences in this writing by Luther are, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all. What? Free lord and dutiful servant. Could this be a place where we could maybe just agree with others who thought Martin Luther might have been losing it in his later years and ignore what he asserts in these statements that sound directly in opposition to each other? I recall having to read this essay of Luther’s on **The Freedom of a Christian** and then we were instructed to distill this several page essay into a few key points called a precis. I still remember this assignment because it was one of the two papers that I submitted in seminary that were handed back to me and I was told, “try again”.*

*Subject to none AND servant to all. Most Christians want to gloss over these words like I did in my first draft. It’s easier to say, “This doesn’t make sense” rather than say “What does this mean?” How can both statements both be true? And what makes matters worse, Luther asserted that you are free and slave at the same time.*

*However, we can’t blame Luther for coining the words to his essay. They were first written by Paul in the words of the second reading for today from 1 Corinthians 9 verse 19. **For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them.** Paul puts both polar opposites of free to all and slave to all in the same sentence. The conjunction “OR” is not between the words free and slave. It is “and”. It is not one or the other, but both slave and free.*

*It is not hard for us to understand why it is hard for us to understand how these two have any connection at all. Most often we consider freedom is something you experience when slavery ends. The Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 was intended to put an end to slavery. For those who work Monday to Friday, it may seem like there is a type of slavery that still exists and when Friday comes, there is a freedom, at least for a few days. Since we have family including school aged grandchildren living with us, I am reminded of the feeling of relief when Friday arrives, and the book bags are tossed off their shoulders and into the corner and out of sight. They feel a little freedom now that the weekend has arrived. Health care workers who’s long 12-hour day schedule may feel a sense of freedom after working a three-day shift. Some people use the rule of 85 by adding their age they started a job to the years they worked in a job and when those numbers equal 85 there can be a long-anticipated end of being tied to a job for many years and the beginning of the freedom of doing what they hoped to in retirement. Notice, the usual direction that we are accustomed to in this life is a direction from slavery or serving others to freedom from others.*

*This is not what Luther asserted concerning the life of a Christian. This is not what Paul stated in 1 Corinthians. As a Christian, you are free to all AND a slave to all. Free and slave both and on the same day.*

*But for Christians, this idea of slavery and freedom works in reverse to what we hope to experience in our retirements. Freedom comes first, then followed by slavery. Paul didn't just accidentally write these words in the wrong order in Corinthians. This was a very intentional theme not just in this reading, but throughout all of his letters. In Galatians 5, Paul declares, "For Freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." The yoke of slavery Paul was speaking about was the law. He said, "Stand firm" in the freedom you have received by Christ by being justified by faith and not by your good works.*

*We know the fears of what could happen in this life when you have no laws to guide you. If you are given freedom, you likely will run wild with it. You might turn your 5-day work week into 4. You as a 5th grader might come home from school as if you already had senior privileges. You might use the rule of 79 instead of 85 to determine your retirement. This is what happens in this life.*

*But Paul said, stand firm and do not submit or apply the rules in this life to the life of a Christian. A Christian is set free by Christ, so that there is nothing left for you to do for your salvation. But since you are now free, you will make yourself a slave to your neighbor. To all your neighbors, even your enemies. Paul said that he became a Jew to win Jews and he became a Gentile to win Gentiles. Paul was free to become a slave for anyone he met.*

*Perfectly free lord and a dutiful servant to all is hard for us to understand and more difficult for us to do. It is only when we remember that we have been set free by Christ that we will become a servant to everyone else.*

*Paul doesn't take credit for how this freedom of a Christian plays out either. Paul received this revelation from Jesus himself. Jesus reveals himself as a slave to all throughout his life. Last week we heard how Jesus gave freedom to the demon possessed man in the synagogue. This man was freed by Christ himself to become a useful servant to others for the rest of his life. In the gospel for today we learn that it was on that same day, as soon as Jesus left the synagogue, he went to the house of Simon and Andrew after learning that Simons' mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. Jesus took her by her hand and when she was lifted by him her fever left her. Simon's mother-in-law did not thank Jesus for curing her and said, "Now I feel better, I think I'll take a nap or now can enjoy my retirement." Instead, she was freed by Christ and as the scripture informs us, **she began to serve.***

*Jesus didn't get the night off that evening to enjoy the company of his disciples and good cooking from Simon's mother-in-law who was serving again. Jesus continued to serve the whole city by curing the sick and casting out demons. Jesus was sent to be a servant for all. Yes, all. Just as we are called to do.*

*Jesus didn't even stop for breakfast in the morning. He went out very early while it was still dark and found just a moment to get away from everyone to pray. After a busy weekend, he didn't leave instructions with his disciples that he was taking the day off and they would be in charge of serving for the day. Instead, the disciples hunted for Jesus and said, everyone is searching for you. Everyone was searching for him because they had seen Jesus healing and preaching good news to everyone as a servant to all would do.*

*Jesus taught his disciples what the Freedom of a Christian means when you have been set free and a slave at the same time. They left Capernaum and went to the neighboring setting others free by proclaiming the good news to all so that they could be servants to others. The Freedom of a Christian was heard by many from Jesus, Paul, Luther, and now you have been again set free to serve. Amen.*