ORDINARY HEROES HAVE POWER

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Galatians 5:16-25 (CEB)

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# SETTING THE CONTEXT

Paul tells the church in Galatia, that through Christ they are freed. They are freed from the long list of religious rules and requirements their former religions demanded of them. Freedom gives us power, power to choose. This freedom though is not license; it does not mean “anything goes.” It is not only “freedom from” things, but it is “freedom to” live united with God. This freedom is to be guided and empowered by the Spirit of God. One can look at a person’s life and see evidence if they are living in cooperation with the Holy Spirit or opposed to it. **Through the letter, Paul teaches the Galatians about the nature of God’s gift of freedom – it is an important lesson, for as Eugene Peterson says, “freedom is a delicate and subtle gift, easily perverted and often squandered**.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Read Galatians 5:16-25 (Common English Bible)

# THE SERMON

**The opening stories of the Bible share that God gave humans power from the very beginning.** In the creation story, God gave the first humans the power to take charge of creation and care for it. In the second creation story, the Bible shows us that God gave humans freedom of choice to eat anything in the garden except one tree. It goes on to show that humans used that freedom to rebel against God, to choose the opposite of what God told them to do. We continue as humans to have that gift of freedom. We continue to have the ability to choose to follow God’s will or to rebel against it. We don’t have to look very far to see the aftermath of those choices – to see the good that comes when we are united to God’s will and way and the harm that comes when we violate the Divine command to love.

Jesus clarified for us God’s will and way as he lived a human life intimately connected to God, a life lived in sync with God’s will and way. Before he died, he promised that his followers would not be abandoned, but would receive the Holy Spirit to continue empowering them to be like him. **Someone asked United Methodist pastor, James Harnish what it meant to be “filled with the Holy Spirit.”** **His response was, “****it means that every inch of my personality, every fiber of my being, is soaked, saturated, drenched, and permeated with the love of God that we see in Jesus Christ**.” I love that image “soaked, saturated, drenched and permeated with the love of God.”

Paul tells the Galatians that when you are drenched in the Spirit it is evident in your actions and interactions. I want us to give some attention to the lists he gives. When I read them my first instinct is to ask, “do I do any of the things on the “bad” list?” I think it goes deeper, though, than a list of do’s and don’ts. Remember he is talking to them about freedom. **The selfish motives list are examples of desires that are distorted by selfishness.** *Christian Ethics professor, Mark Douglas put it this way, “**Paul’s problem with the flesh is not that it desires, but that its desires are disordered; it wants the wrong things or wants good things in the wrong way- usually too much or too little. Wanting sexual intimacy, it pursues [promiscuity or sex without commitment]; wanting contact with the Divine, it pursues idols; wanting joy, it carouses.*”[[2]](#endnote-2) **It is settling for something less than God intended or twisting or corrupting God’s intention.** The appropriate antidote to selfish motives and the aftermath of them according to Paul is to desire properly which is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the power and guidance to live with the character of God which we see in human form in Jesus.

All month, we’ve been talking about what this character looks like using images our children experienced in Vacation Bible School five weeks ago.[[3]](#endnote-3) Ordinary everyday heroes have courage. Ordinary heroes have heart. Ordinary heroes act in faith. Ordinary heroes have hope. **Having courage, having the heart of Jesus, acting in faith, having and sharing hope all take power; they take the power of the Holy Spirit.**

We have also been talking about our vision as a regional church (Desert Southwest Conference) and as a local church that aligns with these characteristics. That vision is “**God calls us to be a Courageous Church: Loving Like Jesus, Acting for Justice, United in Hope**.”[[4]](#endnote-4) In order for us to live that out, we will need not only the desire to be courageous, loving, acting for justice, united in hope, but we will need the power of the Holy Spirit to help us turn desire into reality.

There are almost 150 references to the Spirit of God and Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes as is the case in the Gospel of John, God and Jesus send the Spirit to the faith community, *not* to individuals. In the other gospels, in the Book of Acts, and in Paul’s letters, like Galatians the Spirit is sent to and acts through the individual as well as through the community. The good news for us as individuals and as a faith community is that God’s Spirit is available to us. So, the challenge to us on both levels is the last verse we read from Paul. Here’s how the Message Bible paraphrases it, “***Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives***.”[[5]](#endnote-5) (Galatians 5:25, Message Bible)

Does this mean we’ll always get it right? No, even the disciples who walked with Jesus messed up. We will fall back into those selfish motives from time to time (hopefully less often as we practice and grow.) **We are unfinished[[6]](#endnote-6) and after every fall we have the freedom to choose to turn back to God.** We have the freedom to turn back to the power that brings life and love and reshapes our lives into Christ-likeness.

I’d like to close this sermon series with the ones who inspired it; with our children encouraging us to “Discover Your Strength in God.” Watch video of NSUMC children singing in Vacation Bible School <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb_ehD6l7xM> .[[7]](#endnote-7)

**Each of us are called to be Ordinary Heroes. Each of us are called to have courage, heart, and hope acting in faith. Each of us are called to the life of the Spirit, let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts, but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.** “Feel your heart beat calling loudly feel the power God's given you. Discover your strength in God today.” Amen.

1. Eugene H. Peterson. “Introduction to Galatians.” *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), p. 2113. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Mark Douglas. “Galatians 5:1, 13-25 Theological Perspective” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary Year C Vol. 3*. David L. Bartlett & Barbara Brown Taylor, Eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010) p. 188. Mark Douglas is Associate Professor of Christian Ethics, Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The Vacation Bible School was from June 19-23, 2017 and the theme was “Hero Central: Discover Your Strength in God!” Find out more at <https://2017.cokesburyvbs.com/>.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This vision was shared during the Desert Southwest Annual Conference from June 15-18, 2017. See more about that at <https://dscumc.org/initiative/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 2002), Galatians 5:25, p.2123. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Our special music this week is “Unfinished” by Mandisa. You can hear it at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ejycllx5iwA>. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Watch the Vacation Bible School children singing “Discover Your Strength in God” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zb_ehD6l7xM>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)