

Our first reading is from the book of Galatians 3:23-29. Now, before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the Law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian. For in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as we're baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek. There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female. For all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. This is the word of the Lord. If you please stand for a reading of the gospel, this is from Luke, chapter nine, verses 18 through 24. Once, when Jesus was praying alone with only the disciples near him, he asked them, who do the crowds say that I am? And they answered, John the Baptist.

But others, Elijah and still others that one of the ancient prophets has arisen. And he said to them, but who do you say that I am? And Peter answered the Messiah. The Son of God. Jesus certainly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone saying the Son of man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and scribes and be killed. And on the third day, he'll be raised. And then he said to them all if any of you want to become my followers let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it. And those who lose their life for my sake will save it. This is the word of the Lord.

Well, good morning. Got you. It is a beautiful day, isn't it? It's a special day in a number of ways. First, it's special because about 130 last night, we got a phone call. Our daughter has gone into labor down in Atlanta and so we're heading down there after the service. So this is a great day and we would love your prayers for that. It's also a great day because today's Father's Day. So happy Father's Day to all you dads out there. And to everyone who has a dad. Happy Father's Day to them. We're grateful for the fathers that God has given us and even more grateful if our fathers in any way have let us down that we have a Father in heaven who will never let us down. That he is good. Right? So today is possibly the birth of one of my grandbabies. It's Father's Day. And it's also a day that has now become a national holiday. It's June 10, and if you're like me, the first time I heard that, I had no idea what June 8 was. I was like, what is June 8? And I began to look into it, and June 8 is the combination of June and 19th.

June 19 becomes June 8. And it is a day when African Americans especially have celebrated for quite some time freedom from slavery. And in particular, it happened in this way. In 1862, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and Emancipation Proclamation was to go into effect on January 1 of 1863. And I just realized as I'm doing this, I forgot to dismiss the children. So, kids, it's time for kids alive. God bless you as you go. Pray you bless them, Lord. Kids are about to get a big history lesson. You'll learn this history someday. All right, parents, you can share it with them. Let me pray for them. And pray for us. Lord Father, thank you for this day and ask that you would pour out Your spirit upon your people, that you would pour out Your spirit through the preaching of Your Word and the teaching of those children as they go to kids alive and the teaching of Your children here because you are our Father. So come, Holy Spirit, Jesus be glorified in our midst. It's in Your name we pray. Amen. All right. So in 1862, the Emancipation Proclamation is given by Abraham Lincoln.

It's a take effect on January 1, 1863. So slaves were watching that night on New Year's Eve to see would it take effect with the Proclamation come true. And so even today, on January 1, or rather New Year's Eve, many African American churches have a service that goes until midnight to celebrate the fact that they were emancipated in our country, they were freed. During that time, however, the Emancipation Proclamation freed actually very few slaves. There was still a Civil War to be fought. And as the war was fought and various territories were gained and slaves were freed, many of them joined the fight with the Union to fight against the Confederacy for the freedom of their brothers and sisters who were enslaved. That freedom came about in 1865 six five when the Civil War was over and the Union won and the United States was saved as a nation. However. In Texas. Slave owners neglected to tell their slaves that they were free. And they thought that they would hold out as long as they possibly could to continue to get the labor that they've been getting until June 19, 1866. When federal troops marched into Galveston.

Texas. And enforced the freedom of those who'd been enslaved. Who'd been declared free in 10 00 19 83. But who didn't know that freedom until three and a half years later. It's amazing. I can't imagine what that might have been like. In some ways, I can, because when I first became a Christian back in 1983, I felt as free as could be. I had kind of increasingly felt an oppression in my life, increasingly had felt that there was something that was lacking, that I didn't know what my purpose in life was, but when I came to Christ, it was like night and day. I remember just literally everything looked different. I felt free. I think in that sense, I can relate. But that was a spiritual freedom that I was feeling. I didn't know what it was like to be physically enslaved, to have somebody who literally had the power of life and death over me, and then one day to no longer have that and to actually be considered a free person. Paul writes a lot about that, because, as he writes to the people in the ancient world, there was a lot of slavery, slavery of different magnitudes.

Some who had been enslaved when they'd lost battles and they were taken as prizes. Some had been enslaved because economically, they had to sell themselves into slavery. Some who were born into it and yet could buy themselves out of it eventually. There were all kinds of levels of slavery. And as Paul wrote, he said, this is a fitting analogy for what it is to be in Christ, to be set free from slavery. And that certainly was the case with the Galatians. The Galatians had been a conquered people. Actually, they had been a conquering people. They had come from the northern areas of Europe. They were Celtic tribes that had invaded into Galatia, and so they were Gallish people, but they had been defeated by the Romans, and so they'd become some Serbian to Rome. They were in a vassal state to Rome. And so many of them would look at Romans and realize that in some ways, they had an inferior position. Probably the most privileged people in the empire were Roman citizens, and very few Galatians knew what it was to be a Roman citizen. Many of the Galatians themselves were still in slavery in some way or other.

So, as Paul writes, it's something they could relate to. He said the Gospel came to you in the midst of a sense of inferiority. I don't know what it's like to have been an enslaved person in Galveston, Texas, and then to have been set free. I don't know what it's like to have grown up in the south and to have known freedom from slavery. And yet to have that history. That memory. To oftentimes not be accepted as an equal. Though you're declared legally unequal. To have the Jim Crow laws that came back in the various ways that people manipulated the political system to continue to profit and benefit off of those who are not slaves now. And yet we're still treated as such in so many ways. I don't know what that's like. But as Paul was writing to the Galatians, many of them would have known in some way what that was like and what it was like for them to say now I am free in Christ. Even if I'm a bond slave, I know who I am in Christ. You know, the Lord Jesus. He knew who he was. We heard that in the Gospel.

Who do people say that I am? He always knew who he was. But what he wants for his people is for us to know who we are in Christ, that we're free. And so when Paul was writing to the Galatians, he was writing to them because they had enjoyed this freedom. But after Paul had established them as a church and as churches in that province, other Christians came in, Jewish Christians, because there were synagogues there and several of them had become come into faith in Christ because there was also a lot of travel that went on. And these Jewish Christians who Paul calls the Judaizers came in and said, you're not really free now. You're not really saved until you actually begin to practice Judaism. You need to submit to circumcision. You need to submit to the Judaic laws, the kosher laws, the food laws, to be ceremonially clean. Then you can receive Jesus in truth, because Jesus is Jewish. Then you can be set free. And Paul was saying, no, that's slavery. Again, we who are Jews who lived under the law. Well, here's how he put it. If you don't look in Galatians, chapter three, he makes a whole argument here.

He's saying that submitting to the law is, again, submitting to a kind of slavery. Now, at some point here, I would think that maybe we might have trouble relating because as American Christians, I know very few who feel like they need to submit to some kind of Jewish law, who feel like we need to do dietary things or be circumcised or whatever it might be. And so we think that's something that happened way back then. How does it apply to us now? Are there any ways that we come under the law and that what's Paul speaking to the Galatians are going to apply to us? Well, if you turn to Galatians, chapter one, when Paul is dismayed is what's going on. He says in verse six, I'm astonished

that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ. Do you know that you are called to live in the grace of Christ? It's a calling. What you're called into, you can easily step out of. So you're called to live in the grace of Christ. I'm so astonished that you're quickly deserting that and you're turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

And what he's referring to there, of course, is this Judaizing Gospel that if you keep these kosher laws, then you truly can be accepted. And then he says in verse ten, and here's the key am I now trying to win the approval of human beings or of God? Or am I trying to please people? Do you ever do that? Do you ever try to win the approval of others, try to please people, try to please some standard? Maybe that's even in your head. This is where it applies to us, because this is where law seeps into our lives. Law is always about performance, and there is law all around us. There is law in the way people live lives in their families. There is law in the way people act in neighborhoods. There is law that is written into corporations and business places. And so we constantly fall into the trap of saying, do I measure up right? There is law in our own psychology as we look at Instagram and Facebook and see the kind of lives that people are living and say, do I measure up to those things? And Paul challenges us.

Are you who have been given the grace of Christ now trying to win the approval of people? It's slavery. That's what it is. And so he says this in verse 23 of Galatians before the coming of this faith, and he's talking about faith in Christ, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. Now, he's not saying the Old Testament law was bad. In fact, there are other ways of translating that kind of relate to a shepherd, shepherding their sheep and bringing them into the sheep pen. Why? For their own safety, for their own good. The law was given for the good of the people of Israel, but it was given for a purpose. So he switches analogies here from being held in custody and under lock and key. He says, So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that the truth has come, we are no longer under a guardian. And the word he uses for guardian is this word pedagogos. You ever heard of a pedagog? A pedagog is a strict teacher in the Roman Empire, and the Galatians would have known this.

Those who are wealthy often hired pedagogos to shepherd, to guide their children from the early ages until they came of age, until they had, in essence, they're coming out right. And so the job of the pedagogos was to teach them manors etiquette, was to make sure they got to school on time and got back from school safely. They were to see that they grew up to live into the expectations of the family, to live into the expectations of society. And once the pedagogical job was done, that child was declared a full heir, and that child could now become a man or a woman in society. So that's what the pedagogos did. And I imagine if teens and preteens back then, or anything like teens and preteens are now, they were looking forward of the day when they'd be done with the pedagogos. I've enjoyed hanging out with you, but you've cramped my style. Sometimes right? They're looking for the day of freedom, the day when they get to claim who they are in their family, who they are in society. Now that this faith has come, we're no longer under a guardian. We're no longer in need of the law.

Because the job of the law, the job of the pedagogos is to tell you that there's a measurement and that you're to be striving for. But the job of the law is to tell you you'll never make it right. Are you fast? You need to be faster. Are you smart? You need to be smarter. Are you with it? You need to be more with it. That's what the pedagogos of this world always do. Good is never good enough. So how does this play out in our lives? I know how it can play out in the church. A friend of mine, Ted Melnick, and I used to joke we were both in ministry together and we had to give talks to youth. We were youth leaders at the time. And sometimes we had to give talks to our peers and everything. And we used to laugh and say, if you don't know what to preach about, just say, do we pray enough? Do we pray enough? And just riff on that. Do we pray enough? Do we give enough? That's pedagogo's preaching, right? It's telling people there's a measurement and you're not measuring up. You're giving, but you're not giving enough.

You can always give more. You're praying, but you're not praying enough. You can always pray more. And so churches and pastors and preachers, we often get into this to try to motivate our people. Why? Because it works. I've had people say to me, I want a pasture. Kind of kicks me in the tail. They want a pentagon, somebody to use an essence, emotional, social, spiritual manipulation because it kind of gets things moving, gets things done. That's kind of the way it works in church. There's a book I read

once called Good to Great. Anybody ever read that book? It's a good book. It's about business. And as a church leader, I know lots of church leaders have read that book. And I read that book because you say, I want to take my church from being good to great. I want it to be great. And so there's a lot of great principles in that book and everything. But here's the thing. There are all kinds of great people. There are all kinds of great institutions, all kinds of great teams, all kinds of great societies and great countries. And a lot of those great societies, countries, people are not good.

They're not good. There's a trail of bodies left behind them. There's all kinds of injustices that are done to get great. All kinds of shortcuts that are taken to become great. All kinds of people who are discarded because they're standing in the way of greatness. That's a history of our world good. To great. Alexis de Tokaville has been credited with saying, I don't know if he said it, but he's a French philosopher and writer who had visited America and was very duly impressed during the time of, I think, Washington and the founders of America. I was impressed with America. And he wrote this america is great because America is good. And when America ceases to be good, it will cease to be great. That's a true statement. That's a true statement. Now, whether or not he wrote it, I don't know. But there are a lot of great institutions and great people who are not good. But Jesus is great and Jesus is good. Hey, kitty. She is determined. Come on, Kitty. Come on. I've never heard a cat that's going on like that. A baby looking for her mama. We'll help her after the service.

Right? Jesus is great, but Jesus is also good, and what he wants to build into his people is a goodness. The way this law kind of works itself into us I was talking with Lauren Barrett the other day about this, is that sometimes we're tempted to use law with our kids. We see a kid doing something that they shouldn't be doing, and we tell them, you know, you shouldn't do that because that makes Jesus sad, or you shouldn't do it because it makes God mad. There's a measurement. Come on. There's a measurement and you're not measuring up. That's the message that comes to the kid. It's hard to out preach a cat. Everybody's over there, does anybody want to go get that cat or you don't know? I don't know. She's making a racket. All right, Lauren, you're going to go try that's? All right. Elizabeth's heading over there. Lauren. It might so if we can try to not be distracted yeah, that's all right. But we can readily get into raising up our church, raising up our kids on the idea that God is disappointed with them unless they behave a certain way, unless they learn certain things.

But you know what Paul says to the Galatians? He said, that's not the way of maturity. That's not the way of freedom. Verse 26. So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith. For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. In baptism, you shared in the death of Christ, and now you've been raised to life with Him. You're given the very clothing of Christ. So stop trying to win the approval of God and start instead enjoying the approval of God. When Paul says, Am I trying to please people and win their approval? No. He says, there's only one we need to please and to approve, and he's the one who's already given us his approval. Why? Listen, the standard is no less than God himself. And here it is, where, as Christians, we think, then I should totally despair, because if I can't meet the standards of some of the greatest people and institutions in our country. How in the world will I ever meet the standards of God? And that's the point of the Gospel, that Jesus the great, Jesus the good, Jesus the perfect, gave his life for you and for me, so that you and I might not have to win the approval of God, because we never could.

Instead, it is given to us as children of God, as freed people of God to enjoy. You know, when those slaves were freed in Galveston, Texas, it has now taken hundreds of years for African Americans in this country to be able to enjoy that freedom. We had to have the civil rights movement, we've had to have all kinds of things addressed. And as a society, we still find ourselves divided over it today, because that's humanity right. We can't get these things right. But ideally, a day is coming when black and white, slave and free, male and female, Jew and gentile, the only thing we need to do is enjoy the freedom that has given us in Christ. Even now, we work for all people to enjoy dignity and freedom and life in every possible way in our society, regardless of who it is. And it's right to do so. But we know that when Jesus comes, it will be forever consummated and established. And so Paul writes, there is neither June nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and errors according to the promise he's saying, you're Abraham's offspring.

And what was the promise that was given to Abraham? God said, Abraham, I will bless you. That is, I will prosper you, I will flourish you. I will give you a peace. It can only be known to God's people, and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. All those who have faith, the faith of Abraham, receive that peace, receive that promise, receive that salvation. And that's why, when we come together on Sundays, we celebrate. One of the primary tasks for us as believers is to become a people. Not trying to win the approval of God, but a people who literally enjoy the approval of God. And here's what happens as we do that. We become a people who spread the approval of God. That is, we meet other people, no matter who they are. The approval of God is given through us. To them, we become a gracious people because of the grace that we've received in Christ. I love that. I love the gospel. Amen. So, Father, we ask that your Gospel would take root in us, take root in this tree of life, cause us to be more and more aware of the freedom we have in Christ, of the joy of the life that is ours in Christ.

Let that joy and that life spread from this church into our families, into our communities, across all boundaries, racial boundaries and economic boundaries and the boundaries between male and female and whoever. Lord, let your gospel spread and your blessing be known in this earth and in our lives. In Jesus name we pray. Amen. Amen. And bless that lord kitten. Amen.