

## **Finding Freedom in our Faith**

January 17, 2021

### **1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 3: 1-10**

*<sup>1</sup> Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. <sup>2</sup> At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; <sup>3</sup> the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.*

*<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" <sup>5</sup> and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So, he went and lay down. <sup>6</sup> The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." <sup>7</sup> Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. <sup>8</sup> The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. <sup>9</sup> Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So, Samuel went and lay down in his place. <sup>10</sup> Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."*

### **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6: 12-20**

*<sup>12</sup> "All things are lawful for me," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful for me," but I will not be dominated by anything. <sup>13</sup> "Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food," and God will destroy both one and the*

*other. The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. <sup>14</sup> And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power. <sup>15</sup> Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! <sup>16</sup> Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For it is said, "The two shall be one flesh." <sup>17</sup> But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. <sup>18</sup> Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself. <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body.*



Good morning. Today we continue in our worship series, "Created Anew", delving into how we find and live out the true freedom in our faith. Last week the focus was

on finding your place in God's family. Baptism reminded us that we are each marked with the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit dwells in each of us. The challenge that I gave last week was to begin to discern who and what you were created to be within the family of God. As we begin to explore the freedom found in our relationship with Jesus Christ, let us start with a word of prayer...

Our passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6 may make some people a bit squeamish. The words Paul uses may make some of you feel a little uncomfortable. As I begin, please know that we will not spend a lot of time unpacking fornication and prostitution.

In our passage, Paul does not sugar coat his words – the serious issues in the church in Corinth require serious words. It is so because the church in Corinth was in trouble. Either they did not understand the early Christian teachings, or they were misinterpreting messages to suit their needs. In addition to the fornication and prostitution that Paul addresses directly in our passage for today, they were struggling with food, marriage, the Lord's Supper, liturgy. Friction over these various issues and the division caused by them was creating quite the problem in the church in Corinth. The church members were not able to enjoy the freedom of living in Christian community with one another. Maybe worse yet, they were losing their Christian witness to the world around them. For Paul, these were not issues that should be causing division, much less issues that were lessening the church's witness. For both of these reasons, he felt that they needed to be addressed.



*"All things are lawful for me"* was the central issue that Paul addresses in our passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6. In general, they were misinterpreting freedom. They were trying to take advantage of the freedom that is available through Christ. When children are trying to assert some independence, they often do so by moving away from their parents' control. As adults, we often do so by bending the rules, or by seeing how far we can push the limits of said rules, or by offering a fresh interpretation of what that rule might really mean. Hearing that Jesus freed them from the trappings of this world, and that he offered forgiveness for their sins, the Corinthians were living as if they had license to do whatever they wanted.

They were thinking things like, *"We can sin, Jesus will forgive us"*, *"If this brings me harm, all will be made well in heaven"*, and other similar thoughts. Today we add in thoughts like, *"If no one else knows, what's the harm?"* and *"If I don't get caught..."*.

Some of the behaviors and things that the Corinthians were doing and participating in were either legal or were accepted by society or culture. Fornication and prostitution would be the two key examples named by Paul in our passage for this morning. We could add to this list with the "new" vices of our age. We could add pornography and gambling – at least in certain places - as well as overindulgence in food and drink, just to name a few vices that we wrestle with today. Paul's first response to the *"all things are lawful for me"* claim was this: *"but not all things are beneficial"*.

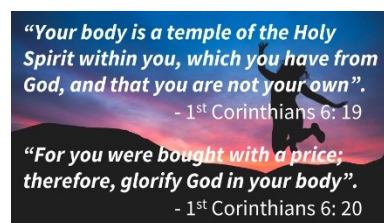
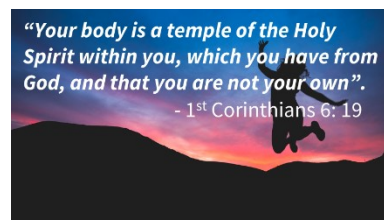


There are consequences to gambling and to pornography and to overindulging in food and drink. These consequences negatively affect our lives and the lives of others. These things would fall into the *"lawful"* but not *"beneficial"* category. Adding an important layer to the discussion, in verse fifteen, Paul writes, *"Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?"* When we do not care well for our bodies, when we do things to and with our bodies, when we sin, we are potentially impacting others in the family of God. What, for example, would you think, or what would outsiders who heard about it think if you saw your pastor entering a house of ill repute in Vegas? What happens in Vegas would not stay in Vegas, would it? That is the type of harm that the Corinthians were doing to their witness to the world.

The Corinthians acted with indulgence as they consumed whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted, believing that they could do so without any real consequences. This harmed their witness to non-believers and to one another. Another consequence of doing so was that their focus was turned inward as they were acting solely on their own needs and wants. Because of this shift in focus, they were unable to live fully and creatively in a community that was pleasing to God. They were growing in bondage to the things of the world and to their own desires. This negative consequence falls into the second response from Paul: *"All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything"*.



We too can cross this line. In wanting to have our way, in wanting to feel good, in wanting to be in control, we too can become captive to our pride and ego and selfish heart. Instead, Paul asserts that *"your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own"*. As believers, we should instead be captive to the Holy Spirit that lives within us. As a closing reminder, in verse 20, Paul writes, *"For you were bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body"*. Christ gave his life for us. Paul's reminder is to honor that gift by glorifying God in all we say and do and think.





So... if being able to do whatever, whenever is not the freedom that we are meant to find in Christ, what is the true freedom that we find in Christ? True Christian freedom is rooted in self-giving agape love. It is

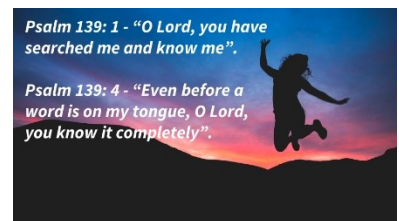
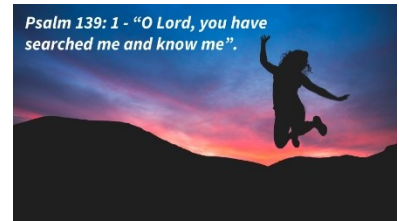
enjoying the freedom of a love without limits, without boundaries, without restrictions. This is the type of love that we experience from God and it is the type of love that we are called to share with our friends and neighbors. It is a radical love. It is an outwardly focused love. It is a selfless love. Loving without limits, without conditions, without boundaries is not possible if we are turned inward, if we are focused on ourselves. When we do not worry about our own wants and when we free our hearts from those worldly things that bind, our hearts are freed to love others more abundantly, more joyously, more authentically. When we love in this way, we are living into the freedom we find in our faith. Living this way, we create a community that is built upon love. A community of love is what God designed and what God created us to be and live within. In Galatians, another letter written by Paul, he gives these words of encouragement: *"For freedom Christ has set us free... For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another"*.

For our second passage for this morning, turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 3. In this familiar passage we hear the call of Samuel. Samuel and Eli both have stories that have been unfolding before the events of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 3. Samuel is part of the story because Eli's sons indulged in the flesh and stole from the sacrifices offered in the temple. They have so displeased God that another has been sought to lead the people. Eli chose not to discipline his sons, not holding them accountable for

their sins. Samuel was brought to the temple as a very young boy. He was the boy born as God's response to Hannah's desperate and pain-filled prayer. In humble response, Hannah dedicated Samuel to the temple as an act of love for her God. Hannah and the sons of Eli are the two sides of living for God and living for self. Samuel is caught up in both of these stories.

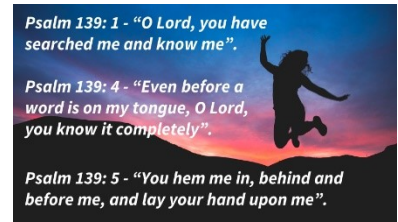
1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 3 opens with some context. Samuel had been serving in the temple since he was a young boy. From the text we learn that hearing from God is not something that has been happening much lately. Eli is now old and weak; his sight is failing. This night, Samuel is lying down in the temple. Three times he hears someone calling, "*Samuel*". Three times he gets up and goes to Eli. Three times. Finally, Eli realizes that God is calling Samuel. The old prophet instructs Samuel to respond to God the next time he calls by saying, "*Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening*". Samuel does as he is instructed, and God does speak, telling him of the destruction coming to Eli's house because of the sins of Eli and his sons. As his story unfolds, Samuel will continue to hear from God. Living in obedience to God will, in fact, characterize all of Samuel's life. Samuel will faithfully serve the Lord his God. He will always do and say the right thing, even when it makes him unpopular, even when it brings him grief and criticism, even when he has to flee for his life. In verse nineteen these words are written: "*The Lord was with him, not allowing any of his words to fail*". Samuel remains with God and God remained with Samuel. This is the connection that we are called to live in and into.

To flesh out this idea a little bit more, I close this morning with a look at Psalm 139, another of the lectionary readings for this week. Turn with me to Psalm 139 as we look briefly at verses one through six. In verse one we read, *"O Lord, you have searched me and known me"*. This is one of the truths about God – all knowing, ever present. As I wrote about earlier this week in my blog, I find both great comfort and a great level of accountability in this verse. God knows what I am going through even when I cannot put my thoughts or prayers into words. God also knows what I am mulling over in my heart all the time. As I reflected on that this week, it came to me that sometimes I'd rather not have God know some of the things that float through my mind. But God's intimacy with us goes even deeper than that. In verse four David reminds us, *"Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely"*. This is a matter of the heart, really. Our thoughts form in the heart. If our heart is corrupt, if our heart is selfish, if our heart is sinful – or thoughts will be corrupt, selfish, sinful. David is reminding us that God knows the condition of our hearts.



In our Corinthians passage, it was the poor conditions of their hearts that led to indulgent and sinful living. Correctly, Paul identified the Holy Spirit as the presence within us that helps us, guides us, and leads us to have our hearts right with God. Last week I spoke of the Holy Spirit that marks us in baptism and dwells within us once we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. David too understood the all-knowing, ever present nature of God.

In verse five he writes, *"You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me"*. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. As children, we test the limits and the boundaries. And as I also said earlier, we also do this as adults, don't we? Just as parents try to steer and guide and correct children as they test and push too far, so too does the Holy Spirit work within each of us, helping us to live a life that is pleasing and holy in God's sight. In seeking to witness to our faith as we live out the freedom to love unconditionally, abundantly, joyously, generously, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is ever before us and behind us, ever speaking into our lives and into our hearts. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, may we witness to the love of God within us as we live out our faith this week. As we find the freedom to faithfully walk with the Lord our God this week, may others see the joy within us as expressed by the person in this picture. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.



### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What "freedoms" have you selfishly claimed that have limited your closeness to God? How can you set these aside to grow closer to God?
- 2) *Pray*. Which thoughts or phrases come to mind when you think about God knowing everything you think? Pray for the courage and strength to allow these things to die inside your heart.
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 139: 13-18. How do these verses encourage you to live into the freedom that God desires us to know as we live out our faith?