

A Spiritual Declaration of Independence Galatians 5:1, 13-14, 19-23

A Presbyterian pastor called the children forward for the children's time. It was a Sunday just like this one, a 4th of July holiday, so he told them about freedom in our country, but more importantly, about our freedom in Christ. Suddenly one of the boys shouted, "I'm free! I'm free!"

Not to be outdone, another boy proudly followed up, declaring, "I'm four!"

Today, the apostle declares, "I'm free!" "For freedom Christ has set us free," he writes. These words were like a spiritual Declaration of Independence for people who felt burdened by religion. Christianity was in danger at the time of becoming like any other religion that sought to justify itself by more laws, rules and regulations. So the apostle not only shouted, "I'm free!" but also "I'm for..." He made it clear he was not only *for* freedom but also *for* love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and all the other fruits of the Spirit.

But just like this holiday reminds us, Paul knew that freedom cannot be taken for granted.

Freedom is not a license to say or do whatever you want. That was the mistake some Christians were making. They were called Antinomians, meaning "against the law." They believed that their freedom meant they could indulge in the "works of the flesh" because God's grace would cover all.

When Sheila and I lived in North Dakota, they still had blue laws – everything was closed on Sunday. Then the pressure came from the Canadian shoppers that led to their removal. People wanted the *freedom* to shop 7 days a week. But a study found that once the laws were removed, this new "freedom" led to a 32% decrease in church attendance while drug use increased anywhere from 7 to 11%. The point: we have to handle freedom responsibly. That means saying "No" to the kinds of self-indulgence Paul lists in our lesson. More to the point, it also means saying "Yes" to the fruits of the Spirit.

There's a British comedy series called *The Vicar of Dibley*. It's about a progressive woman vicar who is assigned to a very traditional small town parish. One of the members of the church council is a man I refer to as Mr. No. No matter the worthiness of the cause, the first response out of his mouth is always, "No, no, no, no."

However, everyone has learned to wait patiently for him to finish, for he will eventually get to “Yes” if it is truly a fruitful work.

Today’s scripture makes it clear that there is no law, no “No” that can stand against the fruits of the Spirit. The day Christ died on the cross became our Independence Day, and when the Holy Spirit came, the church realized real spiritual freedom. It came with the sound of rushing wind and voices ringing out their newfound freedom.

Real freedom rings. It rings like the song says, ringing for a land and a people who remember those who stood and died for the freedom to declare our God the Author of liberty. It rings every time someone stands firm for a faith. It rings like Dr. King said: The more we serve our neighbor in love, the louder it rings. So let freedom ring in your life. Let it ring loudly, declaring, “I’m free! I’m free! I’m free to be a servant of the Lord!”