

Monday, May 4, 2020

The freedom of the Christian - Pastor Hank French

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Ephesians 2:8-10).

These few verses are the bedrock of the Christian's life of faith. We do not earn salvation; it is a free gift of God. Good works do not earn salvation; they are the consequence of salvation. They are the "way of life" of those whose gratitude for God's gifts of grace overflows in goodness.

In his weekly Pastoral Letter to Congregations, Bishop Aitken quoted Martin Luther who, in his little book "The Freedom of the Christian," written 500 years ago, declared:

"Since God has given me in Christ all the riches of righteousness and salvation so that from now on I need nothing except faith, why should I not therefore freely, with all my heart do all things pleasing to God who has overwhelmed me with irresistible riches? ... I will therefore give myself as a Christ to my neighbor and do nothing in this life except what is necessary, profitable, and salutary for my neighbor."

These are powerful, hopeful, encouraging and empowering words. The "freedom of the Christian" is both freedom from every attempt to protect and save ourselves and the freedom to be a channel of God's goodness to others.

"For freedom Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1), free from fear and free to be for others.

As Mother Teresa pointed out, Jesus did not ask us to love the world; he asked to love our neighbors. Love is like a stone thrown into a lake; love is like the concentric circles that move outward across the water from the place where the stone hit the water. If I love my neighbors and my neighbors love their neighbors, and their neighbors love their neighbors, and their neighbors do the same, love moves out in ever expanding circles of goodness.

I see this happening all the time at First Lutheran. It is heartening to see and wonderful to be a part of.

Prayer: God, today let me exercise my freedom as a Christian. Throw me like a stone into a lake and let the circle of your love expand outward. Amen.