

# Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost - “Be on Your Guard”

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 7, 2019  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Decorah, Iowa  
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Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Most of us celebrated Independence Day this past week in some fashion. You may have witnessed a parade or fireworks, attended a picnic, watched a July 4<sup>th</sup> concert or some special programming, observed a baseball game, gone fishing or boating or biking. Did you know that is just what John Adams told his wife Abigail, “There should be all sorts of celebrations all over this nation ... in the generations to come ... “

Most if not all of us probably did some sort of reflection upon Independence and freedom. As citizens of this independent nation we recognize that our independence and the freedoms we cherish are important matters that continually need our attention so that we might continue to be a free people. We need to be on our guard so that we hold fast to the freedom that this nation was founded upon. **Be on your guard ...**

In our second Lesson today, St. Paul is closing his letter to the Christian church in Galatia. Paul had brought the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to this region as a missionary - two or three trips to that area of present day Turkey. He carried the message that ‘Jesus had given himself for our forgiveness.’ It was a message of freedom in Christ, freedom to live and bear fruit. He wrote It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery, trying to keep all the law. Forgiveness was given through Christ and he insisted it was through Christ alone - not Christ and good works, not Christ and keeping the law, not Christ and traditions and practice, but faith in Christ’s suffering and death and resurrection. Forgiveness and salvation come through Christ’s death and resurrection, nothing else - except Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who renders forgiveness to those who put their faith in Him and where there is forgiveness there is life in his name.

That is the gospel that Paul carried and that is the faith that you the church family in this place hold dear. It is what you know and you have been taught. This faith in Jesus is what you count on in the journey of Life. When things are on cruise control, you give thanks, or at least I hope you do. When things seem to be bogged down and in a mess, you pray for strength and wisdom, help, guidance, healing - right?

Here in this congregation you keep coming Sunday after Sunday because you expect to hear and experience the love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus in this place. You come expecting to hear a word from God, to be among God’s faithful people in this place, you come

to pray, to lift up your voices in praise to God, and you expect this almighty God to answer. You come to give of yourself, your time, and your possessions in the mission of this congregation. You come to be among God's faithful who like you come to hear that your sins are forgiven in the name of Christ. Again, that is all good news and it is exciting to be part of this congregation where you know the gospel is proclaimed and lived in this place. That is good news - **still, we need to be on our guard**. This is a world that has lots of different ideas about God and in some cases the lack of God. So, Pastor Amy and you the members of this congregation need to **continue to be on guard** so the gospel continues to be clearly shared in this place to strengthen and inform all who come into and go out from this church building into the world to bear witness to Jesus the Savior of the World.

In the second lesson today, written by the apostle Paul - the one who was called from being persecutor of the Jesus people, the people of the way, to being a proclaimer of the very message he was trying to silence (Acts 9). Now remember, this letter of Paul's did not come because he was so delighted with what was happening in Galatia. Rather, Paul believed there was a major crisis in Galatian churches. They had not been on their guard and the Galatian Christians were watering down the truth of the gospel because some folks, people called Judizers, had come and preached a different message of forgiveness and salvation to these folks after Paul had established congregations in that area. Paul was concerned that the folks there had been duped and had bought into this false gospel, which Paul said was no gospel at all. Truth of the matter is, Paul was really upset with the Galatian folks and those who had come with this other message that contradicted the message of the gospel Paul had shared with them.

If you have never read the Letter to the Galatians, or not read it recently (takes 20 minutes or so), he greets them. Paul starts by telling them he was amazed they had so quickly deserted God the Father who had called them by the grace of Christ - strong language, 'deserted'. He wrote about how the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus had come to him and how his authority to preach the gospel to the gentiles was okayed by pillars in the church, John, Peter, and James. He even shared a story where he faced Peter down because Peter was wishy-washy. Peter had been eating with Gentiles until some Folks who insisted upon circumcision and keeping Jewish traditions and laws came to town. Peter backed away from the gentiles and eating with them. Paul said it is Christ alone that saves us, not Christ and some rituals or traditions or keeping the laws, but Christ alone. Then Paul writes about how the Spirit came to them and pointed out that the Spirit did not come by acts of the law, but by hearing with Faith. Faith is the work of the Spirit, you know.

Paul spends a good deal of space in the letter talking about what the law was intended for and what it cannot do. He wrote that if you think you are going to be circumcised to insure your salvation, you have got to keep all of the law, every bit of it. Then what happens? Then you are in bondage to the law and you have cut yourself off from Christ, he said. Last week the second lesson was on the Fruit of the Spirit. When the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, is at work in us we live by faith. We demonstrate the love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, and self-control - and there is no law against such things - when the Spirit of God is working in us. The fact is, the love of Christ is exhibited in you.

Now in our lesson today we have Paul's closing. Paul talks about things that we need to be **on guard** about in our daily lives. He says be on your guard: When someone is caught in sin or trespasses, you who are spiritual restore that one in gentleness lest you be tempted. Isn't that true for us? When someone tells about another's wrongdoing, we sort of get puffed up thinking I would never do such a thing.

Bear one another's burdens, give a hand, listen to another's hurts and sorrows, offer your time to bring comfort, pray with and for those who are struggling and hurting. When the offering plate is passed here, you know that part of what you give goes from this place to missionaries, world relief and world hunger, seminaries, and the like. That fulfills the law of Christ. I know this congregation has a long history of bearing one another's burdens. Back in the 70's, this congregation sponsored several refugee families. Your congregation inspired our congregation in Riceville to sponsor some refugee families; and then a congregation in Cresco sponsored some more members of that family. And do you know we get a box of chocolates every year at Christmas from one of the family members we sponsored.

**Paul says we should be on our guard.** If anyone thinks he is something (pride) - On Sunday evenings I go to the Mission in Cresco, a Bible training to help folks whose lives have been out of control generally because of drugs and alcohol. One of the new guys came up and said, "You were wonderful." I told him to watch out, my head might swell before these guys. I trust that it is the Spirit at work, not me. So think about who we are without Christ. Think about where we would be without Christ in our lives. Christ has been there for us with hope and promises and with forgiveness and protection in our lives.

Pastor Amy is not here today. She probably would not say much on this next verse, "Let the one who is taught share all good things with the one who teaches ..." As people we are instructed in the word of the Lord. We need to support those who teach and lead and guide us along life's way.

This God of ours is really something - all powerful. God invites us to pray - all present and all seeing. God knows us better than we know ourselves, so do not think you can fool God. He will not be mocked, he can read our motives, he reads our hearts, through and through. We do not have anything that we do that will impress God except when we are walking in the Spirit.

Dear friends in Christ - Continue to seek to hold firmly to Christ alone. There is nothing else that will bring freedom except for the forgiveness won by Jesus Christ on the cross on Calvary and when you believe the Spirit is at work in you. And then my friends, the Lord will use you in all sorts of ways. **Be on your guard and enjoy the journey ...**