

Readings for April 7, 2024

United Church of Strafford In Person and Zoom Service

Possible introduction to the responsive reading:

This reading uses the word slave. Paul meant it to be shocking. He first urges people to throw off slavery to their old ways and fundamentalist interpretations of scripture, but then he tells us to become slaves to one another out of love. He wants to shock us into realizing what it means to love your neighbor as yourself, how it makes us mutually committed to one another's best interest. It is hard for us to hear the word slave today given the historic and current forms of slavery in this country. This may or may not work for you, but just know that it is meant to be shocking, and what Paul means by us being slaves in love is that we are one, that our neighbor truly is our self, and we need to be so free of self-interest that we can place another's interest above our own. Let's rely on God's Spirit and hear what it has to tell us.

Responsive Reading *from Galatians 5 & 6*

Leader: For freedom Christ has set us free!

People: **Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**

Leader: For you were called to freedom,
only do not use your freedom
as an opportunity for self-indulgence,

People: **But through love become slaves to one another.**

Leader: For the whole law is summed up
in a single commandment,
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

People: **If we live by the Spirit,
let us also be guided by the Spirit.**

Leader: The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

People: **You shall reap what you shall sow.
If you sow to the Spirit,
you will reap life without end from the Spirit.**

Leader: So let us not grow weary in doing what is right.

People: **Whenever we have an opportunity,
let us work for the good of all.**

All: **For freedom Christ has set us free!**

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John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.