

Sermon 2007 Pentecost 5 – Proper 8
Text: Galatians 5: 1, 13-25
Theme: “The Yoke or the Cloak”

Some parents are more disposed to making rules than others, but I wonder how many of you ever made a rule that your 7 year old could not drive with friends in the car? That probably wouldn't be a very useful rule. How about those of you with older children? Any of you maintain the rule for your 30 year old that there is no dessert unless he eats all of his vegetables? My guess is that a rule like that would be pretty unenforceable.

The point is that rules are only as good as their practical application. If the particular rule is irrelevant for the population, it is useless. If the rule is unenforceable, it is useless. And what the readings for today tell us is that for us, the law is useless.

Now before I go on I have to carefully define what I mean when I say law. I mean the law the way the Galatians were treating it. For Old Testament Hebrews, the Law was anything and everything spoken by God. In that sense of the word, the law is golden. But when Christians reduce the law down to prescribed rules, or when they make the Bible into a handy rule book for life,

they are misusing the law and turning it into something it is not and it becomes useless.

Elijah placed his cloak over Elisha. The cloak marks Elisha as a prophet of God. Is that Law or Gospel? Apparently Elisha was a bit confused because he ran after Elijah for a rule interpretation. May I go back and say good-bye to my family? Elijah was not the law maker. That was Elisha's call. You have been cloaked. That is gift. That is Gospel. You now make the call for how you best serve the Lord. If that includes going back and saying good-bye then by all means do so.

When you have been cloaked, the law takes on a whole different function in your life. No longer are you bound by rules and regulations – now, under the cloak of God, you are free to do whatever you think is best. But perhaps Elisha did not want that responsibility. Perhaps like you, and like me and like those Galatians, Elisha figured out that this freedom isn't all it's cracked up to be. This freedom is difficult. It comes with decisions.

When that teenager was 7, he didn't have to worry about all those choices to be made about driving. Do I drive with friends in

the car? Do I crank the stereo and talk on the cell phone while tooling through heavy traffic? Likewise, when that 7-year-old is 30, there are many more choices to be made, do I eat right and take care of my body? Do I worship regularly and take care of my faith? Or do I continue acting like a child and making childlike choices as an adult?

Much in the same way as a person is freed to make his own decisions as he grows up; a Christian is freed as the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within him. Elisha was freed to begin a life of service to God when the cloak was laid upon him. Those Galatians were freed by Baptism and the Word to begin new lives of service to God.

History shows us, however, that slaves are known for going back to their masters after being freed because it is easier to have a master to tell you when to sleep and when to rise, when to work and when to eat. Why do we see prisons full of repeat offenders? It is not because jails and prisons are pleasant places to be. It is because some people would rather be in slavery than have to be responsible for making their own decisions. In jail the rules are

clear. There are fewer choices. One does not have to think as much or be as responsible as often.

Satan encourages us, by the way, to believe that freedom is frightening because he would just as soon keep us enslaved. We're easier to watch that way.

I often laugh at people who live in slavery and criticize the Christian life for being too restrictive – too narrow. The fact is; it is their community who is restrictive and narrow. They would be shunned by their society if they began living the Christian life. But when we wear the cloak of Christ, all doors are opened. When, however, we walk under the yoke of slavery our choices are limited.

Under the cloak of Christ I am free to live without chemicals that control me. An addict lives under the yoke of sin and needs those chemicals to function. Under the cloak of Christ, I am free to show love to all people. But one under the yoke of sin has to be careful about ones to whom he shows love because he has to make sure he receives back as much or more than he gives. Under the cloak of Christ, I am free to be joyful regardless of my

circumstances. But one under the yoke of sin cannot rejoice until everything is good for him.

In our Gospel, Jesus gives us some great examples of the difference between living under the yoke or the cloak. The first guy comes along and says, "Hey Jesus, I want to follow you, but first I need to know a few things – like where do we stay? The yoke of slavery is showing through this guy. He needs to know if he will get a good deal before he follows Jesus. Why does it matter? If you are wearing the cloak of Christ, you follow Jesus – that's all there is to it. This guy is sort of like the person who drops a couple dollars in once in a while as the offering plate comes by but says, "boy if the Lord ever blesses me with the Lottery, I'm going to give the church 10%!" Why isn't he giving the church 10% now? Is he only willing to give when he doesn't need it anyway? I'll follow you Lord but first let me take care of me.

The next guy says, "Hey Lord, I want to follow you just as soon as I bury my father." Of course, because Jesus is Jesus, he knows this guy's father was not a believer. So he says, let the dead bury their own dead. In other words, once your loved one has died

outside of faith, he no longer has anything to do with you. This guy makes me think of people who are so busy that they have no time for God. When we are cloaked with Christ, we are free to concentrate on the Gospel and we can walk away from things that demand our time but do little to serve our purpose on earth.

The last guy says, "Hey Lord I want to follow you, but I have some family issues and loose ends to tie up first." That guy is like the person who wants to keep a foot in both worlds. On Sunday I will go to church and be pious and holy. On Monday, it's back to my old comfortable world under the yoke. The cloak of Christ frees us to walk away from life under the yoke. We are free to live a new life of love and patience and all those wonderful things that the Holy Spirit brings to us when we are under the cloak of Christ.

When we become Christian, our lives are changed forever. Like Elisha, one day we are plowing through life, minding our own business. The next thing we know – we've been cloaked with Christ. When the Holy Spirit came into your life – you were freed and a whole world of opportunities opened to you that never before would have been there.

So, while once you had no choice but to live according to the sinful nature under the yoke of the law, now you are filled with the fruit of the Spirit and under the cloak of Christ. That of course does not mean that you are bound to a life according to the Spirit – that would be a yoke. No, you can wear the cloak if you like – or you can put it aside if you like. But understand this. Whenever we choose to live a life that is consistent with the yoke of sin, we begin moving ourselves back into slavery.

It's the yoke or the cloak. We have all been cloaked with the royal robes of Jesus Christ. That means we are freed from the acts of the sinful nature and given the fruit of the Spirit. It means we are free to serve God in all we do. It means we have the power to walk away from the yoke that tries so hard to trap us again. No excuses needed. No rationalizations work. Because you have been cloaked, you are free to choose each and every day. The yoke or the cloak. AMEN.