

7th Sunday after Trinity: August 4, 2019**“You are a Slave”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is our Epistle lesson, Romans 6, especially these words, **“Romans 6:22-23.”**

Modern psychology has borrowed a phrase once used by the worshippers of Apollo, the Greek God of the Sun. It is the phrase inscribed upon his temple at Delphi – *Gnothi seauton* – which means, “Know thyself.” It seems more important to people today to know themselves than to know God. Sadly, very few people really know themselves. They only want to hear the good things about themselves. I don’t want to hear what I am doing wrong, unless I have already determined that I want to change it and you are just going to agree with me. It is the corruption of the sinful nature to regard ourselves not as we truly are. We tend to fall off the horse on one side or the other. Many see themselves as much wiser, more important, more independent, more distinguished, and more happy, or they look upon themselves as being more enslaved, more downtrodden, more unimportant, more unfortunate than the facts actually warrant.

For example, the unbelievers and worldly-minded are not nearly so happy, free, and well off as they imagine themselves to be. The current activist programs pushing many perversions clearly bear this out. Within their camps, freedom is boasted, fingers are pointed with scorn and derision at Christians, whom are considered to be enslaved to ancient, patriarchal cultural norms and outdated philosophical morals. Many express their joy at not being Christian, or worse, their joy of worshipping a new Jesus whose idea of love matches their own. They claim happiness comes in freedom, which means freedom to do whatever, whenever.

On the other hand, Christians often harbor the erroneous idea that they are not free, and that they are somehow entitled to a greater measure of happiness. How often have you complained and grumbled that the Church is too strict, that it has little freedom, or too much discipline? How many pastors and people alike make excuses for God, and relax His words, because after all, “He is a gracious and loving God, and will forgive anyway, right?” As Paul says, “By no means!” Satan is ever alert to sow the seeds of discontent, and the Old Adam is never satisfied.

Only true Christians are really free, happy, and blessed; and it must be said that not all freedom is worthy of the name; not all servitude is alike; not all happiness is of equal value. Ruffles cheddar and sour cream chips make me happy, and my kids make me happy; however, chips and my kids are not equal.

There is a great difference in being a servant, and Paul addresses the great question: It is not are you servant, it is of WHOM are you a servant? It is not simply know thyself, it is more important to know whom you serve.

Freedom and liberty are precious words. One month ago, we walked the streets and lit up the night sky to celebrate our country's freedom. Civil liberty is a blessing. Blood has been shed and lives have been sacrificed to obtain it. Economic freedom is also of great benefit. The right to choose an occupation, engage in trade and commerce, conduct legitimate business, and go about one's daily work is a joy. Religious freedom is a priceless possession. Today, to be a Christian, or convert from Islam, is illegal in several countries, including Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Yemen and North Korea. In many Muslim run countries, Christian churches are burned and Christians are martyred.

Sadly, many of these gifts are often not appreciated until they are lost. Ask the man in the prison cell, the shop owner in Venezuela, and the Christian in Somalia. In America, attacks against religious freedom is many times more covert. Many Christians are scared to speak of Jesus in the workplace, in the store, even in their own homes. Even in a country where civil, economic, and religious freedom still exists, at least for the time being, we are still slaves to sin. "Know thyself" typically means to know what makes you happy, usually a sinful, selfish, passionate desire, and do more of that, damning the consequences – "this is my truth...this make me happy" – what we see is a bunch of so-called Christian men and women, acting like a bunch of temper-tantrum toddlers desperately in need of a nap.

So what are you slave or free? In what is commonly thought of Luther's greatest work, he wrote a piece entitled "The Bondage of the Will"; it was as part of his debate with Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus believed the Roman doctrine of the necessity of the involvement of the will of the person in becoming a Christian. In order to be saved, Rome teaches the individual must prepare himself by an act of will and by good works and love. It is a view that sees sin as something like a stain, or a blemish; so, thusly it can be washed off or scrubbed away with the right amount of elbow grease. Rather than a corruption of will and nature of a person, sin is seen as something that can be overcome in part by man, and thus man cooperates in his conversion and faith – for Rome, this is still their confession.

Against this Pelagian error, Luther disagreed. On the basis of Scripture, our text for this morning, Luther categorically denied the freedom of the will, and spoke of the bondage of the will instead. He pointed out that while one might speak of someone as being free, either as a Christian or as an unbeliever, that freedom was not absolute. Bondage was relative, and as Romans points out, you are a slave one way or the other.

In American ears, slavery is a loaded term. In an absolute sense, we are not slaves, but free children of God. Yet, in an absolute sense, we Christians are not free. We are not free to think just whatever we want. We are not free to do just whatever enters our minds to do. We are perfectly free to live as God's servants - slaves. To do anything else is to reject God and make

ourselves God, and do it our way, instead of His. But we want what He offers and promises and guarantees. It is all so confusing.

That is why Paul writes as he does in our text. He says, **"I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh."** That is to say, *"I know that this is difficult to understand, so let me put this in familiar human terms."* Our freedom is never absolute, and our slavery is more complete and deep and thorough-going than we can imagine. No one can control the heart or the mind of an ordinary slave in this world. You can make them obey, even make them afraid to misstep, but you cannot actually control their thinking. They do that. You cannot make them love you or admire your cause. They may choose to do that, and even become a terrorist-like zealot for your cause, but it is by their decisions, not your work.

Even brainwashing doesn't work until the victim cooperates by choice - horrible and extreme choice, perhaps, but choice none the less. Hypnosis requires a willing subject to really work. Because we are insulated and actually quite alone inside our heads, no man can make another his absolute slave without his cooperation.

This slavery in sin is another matter. We are corrupt. Sin has become entangled in our very nature since the fall. To use a farming image, the original breeding stock became corrupted and so all of their offspring carry the same corruption of sin. We are twisted by nature.

Sin turns us from looking to God and caring about others - as we were created to do - into creatures that turn their gaze to themselves, and view our families and our neighbors, the world, and God Himself, through the twisted perspective of ourselves, our wants, our needs, our lusts, our personal advantage, our feelings, and our own guilt and sin. "Know thyself"? We want more than that, we want everyone to know myself.

Brothers and sisters, not know yourself; rather, know God! The standard is perfection, and we, along with the world, have missed the mark, fallen short, and transgressed into places forbidden by God; that is why the Gospel is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus. We have been corrupted since the Fall, and the slavery to sin, leading to the way of death, is passed down from generation to generation.

In a weird twist, the world calls freedom slavery and slavery freedom. The reality is you are always a slave, you have a master, the question becomes, which do you prefer? Which outcome is more inviting?

Do you want to be free from God and His Law and its nagging interference in your life and your choices? You can be, at least as long as this life endures. This evil, to which we are enslaved by nature, earns death.

Paul writes, **"Therefore what benefit were you then deriving from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the outcome of those things is death."** The death Paul writes about is something deeper than the grave and more horrible to contemplate. The result of sin and evil is more sin and evil - and lawlessness - living without regard for the will of God.

The other slavery results in our sanctification, and ultimately life everlasting which transcends the grave, and knows no pain, or sorrow, or sickness, or regret, or any more death. But if you are to live in righteousness as the chosen child of God, ***you have no choice***. You cannot choose the evil path. You cannot choose the perspectives of the devil. You cannot choose to obey your lusts, or the temptations of the world, or choose to succumb to the seductions of the devil. Your flesh will want to, and you must fight it. You will not be perfectly successful, but, as a faithful servant, you will fight it and struggle to obey Him who has bought you with such a terrible price. You will seek to stay on the roster, so to speak, of the slaves of God who have all that good, and only good, to look forward to as a reward. You will fight with all of your wit and intelligence and values and energy to remain faithful. Anything else is unthinkable unfortunate in outcome.

You struggle to be a faithful servant because you are a faithful servant. The struggle and the works accomplished are not what make you His slave, they are because you are His slave by His own choice and doing. And He promises to help you in the fight and give you the power and the wisdom for the struggle.

"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life."¹ Note well that you have been freed - you did not free yourself, and you derive a benefit, you do not earn something. It is a gift. And the first benefit is sanctification. You are made holy. It isn't an accomplishment of yours, it is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. You are given His holiness. You are declared righteous before God because of what Jesus Christ has done.

This is the Gospel for you! Your sin receives the divine sentence of death. It is carried out - but not on you. Jesus bore that sentence on the cross. He died the death that you have earned, and endured the very torments of hell on the cross and in His passion. His death on the cross was your death. He did it for you, that you might be redeemed and rescued.

He died to take the penalty you have so richly earned by sin, and then He rose from the grave to proclaim His victory and tell you that it worked! Your sins are forgiven! God loves you, and you will live forever, even if you die - for you will rise from your grave unto eternal life in glory with Him. **"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he**

¹ Romans 6:22

was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”²

So, having been cleansed and forgiven, having been made righteous and given a holiness which you did not work out but received by grace through faith, St. Paul asks, what do you want to do with it? Do you want to walk away from it? Do you want to sully it and smear the filth of more sins on it?

Of course not! You desire to remain holy. You want to live out that good will of God in your life that the good will of God for you might finally come to pass. And what is that will of God for you?

You are a slave. And this slavery is more deep and thorough-going than you realize. You cannot feel it in its truth because you still wear the traitorous flesh. Your flesh is still hungry for sin and evil, but you are now the holy servant of God. Your will is shaped to be like His will. He shaped it, not you. You may not "feel" that will, but it is at work in you. The outcome of your new slavery is **"your sanctification."** You can see it in your life more easily than you can feel it in your consciousness. God is at work in you, bringing your life and conduct into conformity with His will. The task is never complete while we wear this flesh, infected with sin, but it is happening, and at the end, the outcome of all this work of God is eternal life for you! **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Mark those words well. You earn and deserve death with sin. But your righteousness is a gift, and your holiness is a gift, and your life and salvation in Jesus Christ is a gift. But you are a slave, always. Either you know and serve yourself in sin with Satan and death and hell, or you serve God and righteousness and He gives you holiness and life everlasting. **The free gift of God** - you did not earn it or deserve it, but God chose you and gave it to you, **is eternal life in Christ Jesus.**

True knowledge of freedom begins with the verses that precede our text, the Epistle from last week. We end our sermon with the words of Romans 6:

“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

² Isaiah 53:4–5

⁵ *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* ⁶ *We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* ⁷ *For one who has died has been set free from sin.* ⁸ *Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.* ⁹ *We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.* ¹⁰ *For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.* ¹¹ *So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

¹² *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.* ¹³ *Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.* ¹⁴ *For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”*³ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

³ Romans 6:1–14

Prayer of the Church
Seventh Sunday after Trinity
4 August 2019

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Almighty God, through Your Holy Word, teach us, Your baptized children, the fear of the Lord. Create in us humble and contrite hearts, fill us with Your love, and give us the fruit that leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Raise up faithful men from among us and send them into Your vineyard, that the Gospel may be proclaimed everywhere. Bless all pastors in Christ, that they would be diligent in their studies and serve Your people faithfully. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Look with favor upon our congregation. Bestow in us the desire to love one another as we have been loved by You, and give us generous hearts, that we would support Your work among us with our tithes and offerings. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Send Your blessing upon our nation and its leaders. Guide them in the direction You would have them go, that peace and prosperity, truth and justice, religion and piety may dwell in our land. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Have mercy on the elderly, the shut-in and all those in need of ongoing care, be with all those who are sick, hospitalized, in treatment, undergoing surgery, recovering or suffering in any way [*including Susan, Lorraine, Carmen, Larry, Dennis, Marvin, Kevin, Marvin, and those we name in our hearts*]. Comfort them with Your presence, sustain their faith through Your gracious promises, and bring healing to them as You will and know to be best. Provide them with compassionate and loving caregivers, and bless the nursing homes throughout our land. Send pastors to bring them Christ through His Holy Word and Sacraments. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, You created man and woman and joined them together in holy marriage, thereby reflecting the mystical union between Christ and His bride, the Church. By Your infinite goodness, let Your blessing rest upon all husbands and wives especially those with anniversaries this week; ***Marvin & Ruth, Dale & Kris, Ken & Jan, and Tim & Pam***, that they may live together to Your glory in this life and with joy may come to everlasting life; Sanctify our homes with Your presence, and bless them with joy. Keep our children in the covenant of their Baptism, and enable their parents to bring them up in lives of faith and devotion. Unite the members of all families in a spirit of affection and service that they may show Your praise in our land and in all the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servant ***Sophia*** whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *she* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *her* trust in Your goodness all the days of *her* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Fulfill Your promise to fill the wedding banquet of Your Son and His Bride, the Church, with guests clad in white robes. For those who have gone before us and now rest from their labors, we give You thanks and praise. Bring us, with them, to the day of our Lord's glorious return, that we may all receive the eternal inheritance You have prepared for us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**