

Fourth Weekend After Pentecost (RCL/A)
Romans 6:12-23; Matthew 10:40-42
June 27-28, 2020
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Here we are a week before Independence Day, and we can all agree we love our independence and cherish our freedoms. We've heard how some can go a bit overboard with their self-determination, though, and claim they "don't have to wear masks, no matter what anyone says!" More importantly than the fact the Government CAN tell us what to do, for our own safety, these folks are missing the "love of neighbor" message that wearing a mask sends. "I feel fine and as far as I know I'm perfectly healthy, but in case I'm an asymptomatic carrier, I'm going to protect YOU by wearing a mask" (which I'll do when I'm 6 feet or less away from you).

That independent streak in us Americans may cringe when we hear Paul refer to the baptized (us) as "*slaves of righteousness*" in today's first lesson from Romans (Romans 6:18). Like some of the people Jesus addressed, we wanna protest "We've never been slaves to anyone!" (John 8:33) Paul also says, "...*you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God*" (Romans 6:22a). I wanna say I'm freed from sin so I can be **devoted to** God, not **enslaved by** God.... I'm always saying we serve **joyfully** as beloved, accepted children of the Most High, not **begrudgingly** as indentured servants or enslaved persons. So I thought it might be helpful for us to hear Paul's important, timely message in modern, less theological terms. I don't want you to miss it or give up trying to understand it. So here it is in *The Message* paraphrase.

¹²⁻¹⁴ ...[Y]ou must not give sin a vote in the way you conduct your lives. Don't give it the time of day. Don't even run little errands that are connected with that old way of life. Throw yourselves wholeheartedly and full-time—remember, you've been raised from the dead!—into God's way of doing things. Sin can't tell you how to live. After all, you're not living under that old tyranny any longer. You're living in the freedom of God.

¹⁵⁻¹⁸ So, since we're out from under the old tyranny, does that mean we can live any old way we want? Since we're free in the freedom of God, can we do anything that comes to mind?

Hardly. You know well enough from your own experience that there are some acts of so-called freedom that destroy freedom. Offer yourselves to sin, for instance, and it's your last free act. But offer yourselves to the ways of God and the freedom never quits. All your lives you've let sin tell you what to do. But thank God you've started listening to a new master, one whose commands set you free to live openly in *his* freedom!

¹⁹ I'm using this freedom language because it's easy to picture. You can readily recall, can't you, how at one time the more you did just what you felt like doing—not caring about others, not caring about God—the worse your life became and the less freedom you had? And how much different is it now as you live in God's freedom, your lives healed and expansive in holiness?

²⁰⁻²¹ As long as you did what you felt like doing, ignoring God, you didn't have to bother with right thinking or right living, or right *anything* for that matter. But do you call that a free life? What did you get out of it? Nothing you're proud of now. Where did it get you? A dead end.

²²⁻²³ But now that you've found you don't have to listen to sin tell you what to do, and have discovered the delight of listening to God telling you, what a surprise! A whole, healed, put-together life right now, with more and more of life on the way! Work hard for sin your whole life and your pension is death. But God's gift is *real life*, eternal life, delivered by Jesus, our Master.

Paul almost speaks of our attraction to sin as an addiction. In order to resist the craving for what we know is death-dealing not life-giving, we have to remind ourselves that falling to temptation may give a rush of pleasure in the moment, but it has **awful** side effects and **disastrous** consequences in the long run. In simple terms, is the buzz off of alcohol or the high of drugs worth losing your license, your livelihood, your family, your self-dignity, maybe even your life? Is the fleeting thrill of falling to temptation worth separation from our Savior?? Think of how much you have yearned to receive Him in this Holy Supper over the past three months. For you at home, think of how you long for COVID to pass or for treatment or vaccine to become reality, so you, too, can safely return to this sanctuary,!

Paul keeps coming back to the saving power of our Baptism into Christ's death. In our gathering hymn, *Baptized and Set Free*, we heard these words:

We are people created, chosen by God.
Then we're washed ever gently, in mercy and love.

Sin has power no more. Jesus opened the door
to a fountain bringing healing and wholeness and more.

The water may have been poured “ever gently” over our head, but the cleansing of sin we receive through water and the Word is a **scouring** of sin, a **purification** of everything in us that clamors to claim ourselves as Number 1. As Paul says elsewhere (1 Corinthians 7):

²³ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.

They say, “You get what you pay for.” But in this case, **we** get what **Jesus** paid for, with His life, on the cross. Because of that, Paul says:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:19b-20)

A couple weeks ago we sang, “’Tis not all we owe to Jesus, it is something more than all...”

(*There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*). And therefore we give our all to our Lord Jesus We choose to serve Him above all others. Because serve we will. As someone has written:

Servanthood there will be – there is no escape from this truth of existence. The question is only service to whom or to what?¹

Service to ourselves equals service to sin. Because of Holy Baptism, we can’t use the excuse, “The Devil made me do it.” God has given us grace to resist temptation and do the next right thing. As Luther writes:

...unless the Lord were in us, “who is faithful and will not let us be tempted beyond our strength (1 Cor. 10:13), surely the waves would overwhelm us... but He is faithful to those who stand and call upon Him in faith.²

Amen.

¹Roy A. Harrisville, *Romans (Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980)*, p. 96.

²Hilton S. Oswald, ed., *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 25, Lectures on Romans (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), p. 318.

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