

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: Romans 6:19-23

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Saint Paul speaks to us the way he does because of the weakness of our flesh. We are pigheaded, hard-hearted, and stiff-necked people. We confess our faith in JESUS CHRIST and all He endured to save us, but like pigs to the trough, time and again, we return to our old sinful ways.

Do you not know that whom you obey is your master? Are you not aware that you are a slave to whom or what you serve? When you serve your sinful desires you are a slave to sin. Therefore, remember the words of our LORD, *“No slave can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”*

We Americans have an aversion to the words *“slave”* and *“slavery”*. In some sense, this is understandable because slavery has left a well-deserved dark stain on the history of our great land. To quote a line from the recent film, Sound of Freedom, *“God’s children are not for sale.”* No man, woman, or government of any country has the right to own another human being.

Still, *“slave”* and *“slavery”* are apt terms when it comes to your salvation, even if your pride rankles at the mere thought of being enslaved to anyone or anything. That was the point of our LORD and St. Paul; either you are a slave of *“sin leading to death,”* for as Paul wrote, *“...the wages of sin is death,”* or you are a slave to *“obedience leading to righteousness.”*

You see, sin has its wages. Death is earned. It is the consequence of sin. Sin leaves us with a bill that must be paid, and it can only be paid by the death of the sinner. Eternal life, on the other hand, cannot be earned, it is a gift of God. Freely given and freely received, it is the gift poured over us in Baptism, and into us in the LORD’s Supper, and pronounced to us in the blessed words of Absolution.

Consequently, one is either a slave of sin, and therefore, to Satan, or a slave to righteousness, and therefore, to God. Thus, there is a line of demarcation of sorts in the life of a Christian—between life and death. Every worship service serves to renew and highlight the contrast between slavery which leads to condemnation and death, and

slavery which leads to righteousness, salvation, and the gift of eternal life. To whom do you yield? Who is your master?

When sin is your master, it is ever-demanding and never satisfied. With sin as your master, you are fully dependent on the needs and desires of the flesh—a lusting that can never be satisfied. With CHRIST JESUS as your Master, you are fully dependent on the Blood of JESUS and the promises of His Gospel. Simply put, Paul’s point is that there is no real alternative to slavery. Either one is a slave to sin, or one is a slave to CHRIST. There is no third choice. No middle ground. Everyone serves one or the other.

To present oneself as a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness is an option only for one who is baptized. Before Baptism and conversion, no one has the ability to serve God. Instead, we are born as slaves to impurity and unrighteousness. As King David writes in Psalm 51, “*...in sin my mother conceived me.*” Before Baptism, sin has dominion, holding a tyrannical sway over us.

Yet, Baptism does not end the battle but initiates the struggle. Before conversion by water, Word, and SPIRIT, we are happy to sin, being unaware of the Law of God. We serve as slaves to sin because our flesh rebels against righteousness. Being baptized, we become aware of the Law of God and the price violation of the Law, or sin, demands. St. Paul warns us against returning to sin’s domain and again becoming slaves of unrighteousness. He tells us that the battlefield against sin exists in our flesh.

As baptized children of God, we have died to sin, sharing in the death of our LORD as the payment that our sins and violation of God’s Law demand. Therefore, sin no longer reigns over us. The chains of our slavery to sin are loosed. The wages of our sins, the wages we earned, were paid out as JESUS suffered and died nailed to His Cross on that first Good Friday. We are freed from the demands of the Law and the wages of sin. Sin no longer has dominion over us for we are not under the Law but under grace. Yet, “*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*”

Sin, and our weak flesh, fight to bind us once again. Every sin diminishes our capacity for life, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. Sin darkens the intellect, dulls the conscience, and destroys the soul. Sin kills! Though we struggle in this life against our flesh, the pain we endure is not a result of an arbitrary god who delights in watching us squirm. What we suffer in this vale of tears is a direct result of our sins.

In the same way, the joy we experience is not a result of our righteousness but that of the righteousness of CHRIST; a gracious and merciful gift in spite of our unrighteousness. Death we earn and deserve but God’s grace, mercy, and love cannot be earned. Eternal life cannot be earned. They are a gift of God!

Thanks be to God that though we were once slaves of sin, He has opened our eyes to see, our ears to hear, and our hearts that we may believe, making us slaves of righteousness. God has showered us with His compassion. He has seen our frailty; He has seen the poverty of our spirit; He has seen our weakness and our need.

God's compassion caused CHRIST to give up the joys of heaven, stepping down from His heavenly throne to assume our flesh, to live among us, subject to all our wants and laid bare to all our temptations, and yet, overcoming them all. Our LORD JESUS has known all our pain, our frustrations, and our sorrow. He gave Himself up to our vindictiveness, our cruelty, and our hatred. He died our death. He has forgiven us all our sins and made us His brothers and sisters, the children of our heavenly FATHER. This is God's compassion.

You were slaves to sin and unrighteousness, *"...when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in CHRIST JESUS our LORD."*

Now, JESUS bids us, to come unto Him, follow Him, and listen to Him. He is here to feed us with His own hand. He gives us more than we can or would ever ask for, more than we ever knew we needed. He gives us life and salvation through the forgiveness of our sins in Water and Word and with His very own Body and Blood, given and shed for us so that we are freed from sin to live with Him forever. With these, He crucifies our sinful desires and strengthens us for the struggles against our flesh. With these, He gives His love and compassion to us. With these JESUS says: *"I forgive you all your sins."*

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