

Pastor Kenneth Mars

St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 7A)

June 22, 2014

Text: Romans 6:12–23

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's been an exhilarating 6 months contemplating the great events in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. It all began with Advent continued through Christmas and Epiphany. The intensity jumped exponentially throughout Lent only to reach the joyous and triumphant climax of Easter. Jesus rose from the dead conquering the dreadful power of death and the grave. The resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. From the majesty of the Father's right hand, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit upon His beloved Church so that all three persons of the holy blessed Trinity might dwell within our hearts and minds and bodies forever.

That brings us up to today. The remaining 6 months of the Pentecost season will teach us what it means to be redeemed Christians who live under the grace and promises of Jesus. Or to put it differently, these next 6 months will amplify and illuminate God's grace and steadfast love working powerfully in your lives. This is the time of growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Pe. 3:18).

It's quite common for certain Protestant traditions to ask, "Is Jesus your personal Lord and Savior?" It's a unique, though not completely unproblematic, way of asking if you're a Christian. During this Pentecost season, we might ask the question differently, in a way that puts the emphasis in a better place, "Is Jesus making you a personal disciple?" Putting it this way places the emphasis on the saving work of Jesus in your life. Jesus is the One who makes you His personal disciple.

And there's no better way than to take an extended look at the book of Romans. Beginning today and continuing through early September, we will direct our prayerful attention to the appointed epistle readings from Paul's great letter to the Romans. This letter is the most systematically developed writing of Christian teaching in the entire Bible. Our efforts studying these inspired words will be time more than well spent.

And through it all, Jesus will continue to make us His personal disciples. For He has promised that where His Word is proclaimed and when His sacraments are given, He is there with His people transforming them into His new creation.

We begin with today's reading from Romans 6, included in your worship bulletin. In order to set things up properly, we really need to start at the beginning of the chapter. The apostle Paul asks a question, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" (vs. 1) It's a question that continues to be asked every time the enormously gracious and free character of Christ's Gospel is proclaimed. The Christian Gospel, according to Romans 5:20, says, "where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." In other words, whenever sin increases, grace and forgiveness increase all the more. You can never out-sin Christ's forgiveness won in His death and resurrection.

You can well imagine how our sinful nature hears such an outrageous promise. It goes something like this, "If I sin, grace abounds. If I sin exceedingly, grace abounds all the more exceedingly! Why not sin and sin and sin and sin because there will always be more grace." It's a theological way of saying I get to have my sin-cake and eat it too without any of the consequences!

Paul's answer to this misunderstanding of the Gospel is, "By no means!" (Rom. 6:2a). The reason is made clear with Paul's follow-up, "How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 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" (Rom. 6:2a-4).

The reason we can't just let sin have free reign in our lives is we're dead to it! The Christian Gospel isn't some excuse to keep on living in sin. By no means! How can you live in something that you're dead too? It doesn't make a lick of sense. Your baptism was the most profound experience of your life, whether you remember it or not. Before your baptism, you were alive to sin and dead to God's righteousness and life. In baptism, you were made alive to God in the resurrection life of Jesus and became dead to sin.

When Jesus made you His personal disciple, you became a different person. Listen to vs. 11 (just before today's reading), "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." That's who you are – alive to God – no matter what anyone or anything says otherwise!!

That brings us up to today's reading. Vs. 12–13, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 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.” These verses describe the natural, normal implications of being alive to God in Christ Jesus. Your physical body must be brought, sometimes kicking and screaming, into harmony with who you are in Christ. You're His personal disciples; He calls the shots, not the passions of your human body. You've been brought from death to life. The trouble is that our sinful, human nature – our minds, thoughts, emotions, habits and ways of thinking – doesn't easily or naturally submit to what Jesus declares to be true of us.

The grace of God in Christ is absolutely and completely opposite of what we think and experience. Jesus says we're alive to Him and His righteousness. Our daily experience hears the thundering shouts of God's law that reveals we are tainted by sin and disobedience. But Paul declares, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (vs. 14). The Gospel declares that since you're alive to God in Christ, you aren't under the judgments of the Law. Rather, you're under His grace, the Lord's undeserved kindness.

Paul anticipates a similar line of thinking to what we heard earlier. Look at vs. 15, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” Freedom from the Law is not license to sin but rather freedom to pursue righteousness. The natural consequence of being freed from the Law is described in vs. 16–18. I encourage you to follow along,

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

Thanks be to God that you have become slaves of righteousness! Wow! Not that's a different way of thinking about being a Christian, a slave to righteousness because you have been freed from the Law.

It doesn't seem to make sense, does it? Order in our world is typically established through good and just laws. But not so as a personal disciple of Jesus. You have been

set free from a self-made, self-generated righteousness which comes from obedience to the Law. That kind of righteousness led to death because our sinful human nature always corrupted every thought, word, and deed. Now that you are baptized into Jesus, you are dead to sin. The Law can make no claims on you for you are alive to God in Christ Jesus as a slave to His righteousness. Now, you can offer you body, heart, soul, mind, habit, will, intention – everything – as a slave of righteousness.

The Apostle Paul's description of the Gospel is so clear and amazing that we need to hear it again and again. For it go against our normal way of thinking. There are two dangers that Christians must avoid. I've already mentioned one: the danger of thinking that you can live a life of sin because grace will always abound all the more. The second danger is a Christianized form of legalism which says that a Christian must live under the Law with all its threats and punishments. Neither is true. There is no such thing as a slave to sin under God's grace (first option) nor is there the possibility of being a slave to righteousness under the Law (second option). Those possibilities don't exist.

Every human being is either a slave to sin under the Law or a slave to righteousness under the Gospel. One way leads to death, the other to life. What makes the differences? Jesus, pure and simple. Jesus calls men, women, and children to be His personal disciples through the saving, liberating power of His Gospel. He changes you from being a slave to sin which leads to death to being a slave to righteousness which leads to life. Paul summarizes is nicely in vs. 23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The past six month we have been hearing and rejoicing in everything Jesus did in order to set us free from the power of sin and death. These next six months will be hearing and rejoicing in everything Jesus is doing to us and in us as His beloved personal disciples. You are alive to God and slaves of righteousness leading to eternal life in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God!!

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.