

Pastor T.C. Arnold
7th Sunday after Trinity
Romans 6:22
July 15th, 2018

But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.

Funny how it works. When a Christian is set free he becomes a slave. Another paradox. We have already discovered that is what the Christian life is all about. His death means our life... “Whoever loses his life for my sake,” says Jesus, “will find it.” The Christian life really is found in the opposites. Just like we see right here in Romans... again.

Set free from sin by death in order to be a slave to God in life. This sounds a lot like something Martin Luther said in a simple tract he called “*On Christian Freedom*.” He said, “A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to all.” Here we go again. Slavery means freedom... death means life... losing means finding... sounds like our God, always turning things around and making what we think is bad into something so good. And on top of all that we find out that we can be two things at once. We can be both free and a slave. That’s what the Christian life is all about. It’s about being a slave and about being free. And, in the text for today, Paul says that we have been set free from sin and since that setting free has taken place, we have become slaves to God. But being a slave to God is not bad. It is good.

I know we don’t often think of slavery as being good. You might be surprised to know that in the ancient Roman world slavery wasn’t as bad as you might think it was. Of course, when using these words about slavery, Paul knew all about how this worked. It would be a good review for us to know how it works as well.

In the Roman world, slaves could serve in a variety of positions. Roman slaves quite often held positions of power and responsibility. Slavery was not associated with the oppression of a particular race. Typical Roman slaves hoped for release at age 30 the usual age for discharge. While in service, slaves could earn wages, buy and sell property and enter into contracts – and even own slaves themselves. Frequently, Roman free persons sold themselves into slavery in order to pay debts, while non-Roman persons sold themselves in order to eventually obtain Roman citizenship. The understanding of slavery throughout the ages is quite broad.

So when Paul tells us to be a slave to God, we must understand what that truly means. As a slave to God we are not oppressed by Him. As slaves of God we are free to earn wages, buy and sell property and enter into contracts. In other words, we are free to prosper yet that freedom doesn’t mean that prosperity can be put above the master. As a slave of God, we seek citizenship in his kingdom for life everlasting by abandoning the slavery of sin and the world and joining up with God’s righteous crew – not a righteousness earned but a righteousness granted. To be a slave to God is the ultimate freedom because it means being within His household, under His care, and one who will inherit all the promises afforded by the master who grants all things well.

I pray that you will be intentional about being a slave in this way. Not as one owned by another person – but as one whose life is totally taken and given by righteousness that was purchased and won for you on the cross. Our lives are in servant-hood to God’s righteousness. As believers we are slaves to what Christ has won for us. We are slaves. Christians long to be slaves.

But as Paul would point out – the problem with Christians is that we long to be slaves of the wrong things. In our Baptism we are set free from sin. We, rather, have a habit of returning to it and also become slaves to it. When we fall into the trap of sin we are serving sin – and sin leads to death. We are to serve Christ but sin takes precedence. Sin is our master. When the Lord would have us to bless our neighbor who speaks against us, we would rather hold grudges and not speak to them at all or speak ill of them. With this we serve sin. When we conspire to get away with something – to cheat at work – to cheat at home – to deceive for personal gratification – our mind is set on serving sin which leads to death. And beloved in the Lord – it is dangerous to be a slave to sin. Sin will grip you and never let you go. Sin will dominate you and remain the most important thing unless combated with the Word of God. Sin seeks to do the opposite of what your Baptism has given you – service to righteousness. Sin seeks to hurt you and to hurt those around you. Flee from such slave-hood. Paul sets it clearly before us in the Epistle reading. He makes it plain through plain words. He says, *“I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.”*

In human terms – you are free from the bondage of sin in Christ Jesus. Therefore, flee from it and do not become a slave to it any longer by letting it rule over you. You are free which means you are free to be a slave to God – His eternal righteousness. This is the kind of slavery we want. This is where we want to be. Because we know that whether we are slave or free, we are still human. And within this human life, tragedy strikes. And when tragedy strikes, we want God to be our master – we want Him to be over us and WITH us. And when our God explicitly shows us how... by showing us the cross... by dying on that cross for you and me, we see, in human terms – those we can understand – how God comforts His people. He doesn't rule from a far off place. He rules alongside those He loves. He loves by suffering with and for His people. He shows compassion by taking the place of those He loves in death and by always keeping his promises to steer us through the difficult times.

In Christ, you know who you are and whose you are. It's wonderful to have an identity that shows us how we belong. We have names identifying that we belong together in the same family. Your last name binds you to those you belong with. Then, by being a member of this church, you have another identity. This identity also explains a little more about you... what you believe and who your extended family is. And then, we call you Christian to widen our family even further. You belong to the family of God... more than slaves you are sons and daughters. We bind ourselves as “slaves” to God and His righteousness but God treats us as children – His precious children who inherit all that the heavenly Father would have for us. This is good news! This is true freedom. We are free to be slaves.

Funny how it works. When a Christian is set free he becomes a slave. Another paradox. This IS what the Christian life is all about. His death for your life. His bondage for your freedom. Like Luther mentions, the Christian life is truly a “both/and” life and not an “either/or” life. We are free, and lord of all, subject to none... and at the same time a dutiful servant of all, subject to all. This truth puts you and me into action... not because we “have to” but because we “get to”. We are freed by God to serve. And when we serve our neighbor, we serve Him. And thanks be to God, He is with us providing the means... giving the strength... to be the best slaves. He gives this. He provides this... for you. Thanks be to God. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.