

Fourth Sunday After Pentecost
June 28, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship: *Spirit of the Living God (UMH-393)*
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.

Centering Words:

Our hearts are weighed down by our attachments in this life. As we enter a time of worship, may we exhale our worries and inhale the Spirit of God that surrounds us. May we find here a space for release and reflection- a space to empty our souls and create a refuge for Sabbath rest. (from- *The Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 141*)

Affirmation of Faith: Apostle's Creed

Prayer of the Day:

Look graciously, O Lord, upon this land.
Where it is in pride, subdue it.
Where it is in need, supply it.
Where it is in error, rectify it.
Where it is in default, restore it.

And where it holds to that which is just and compassionate, support it.

This we ask through Christ our Lord who taught us to pray: (*UM Book of Worship, 516*)

The Lord's Prayer

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word
O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading Genesis 22: 1-14

Psalm 13

Gospel Reading Matthew 10: 40-42

Special Music Brendan Ellis

Epistle Reading Romans 6: 1-11

Sermon

Slave to Sin or Servant of Righteousness

Hymn

Take My Life and Let It Be (UMH, 399)

Take my life, and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.
Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Benediction:

God's steadfast love is etched into our souls. May we carry it with us always. Whether welcoming the stranger, whether risking all we have, whether facing the cross, whether wrestling with God's call, whether freeing ourselves from our past, God is our constant companion on this journey. Amen. (from *The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020, 144*)

Response:

God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Slaves of Sin or Servants for Righteousness

6/28/2020

Romans 6: 12-23

This talk of being slaves in this passage makes me feel a little uncomfortable. Being slaves to sin? Does that mean Satan is lording over us with a whip forcing us to mistreat others, drink, smoke, do drugs and there is nothing we can do about it? Then being a slave to righteousness? Does that mean God is lording over us with a whip forcing us to treat others kindly, maintain a healthy lifestyle, keeping ourselves clean and pure, no drinking, smoking, doing drugs? Neither one gives me warm fuzzy feelings.

When we think of slavery and being a slave, we most often think of the Antebellum South, that time when millions of Africans and their descendants were forced into labor in cane fields, rice plantations and cotton fields. There was forced slave labor in the Greco-Roman world of Paul, usually defeated peoples of the Roman military or people taken for failure to pay taxes. This does not seem to be what Paul has in mind in this passage.

The Greek word, *doulas*, may be translated as either slave or servant. Paul appears to be using the word in the context of the patronage system of the day. This is where the client might “sell” themselves as a servant to a wealthy patron. The client would pledge his allegiance and obedience to the patron. This was common among the artisan and scholar class, to have the security of being a servant- artist, teacher, accountant, etc., to a wealthy person.

When Paul talks about being a slave to sin, does that mean that we are obedient to the one that tells us to do bad things? Are we continually forced to do evil because, as Geraldine on the old *Flip Wilson Show* always exclaimed, “The Devil made me do it!” The devil made me do it because I am a slave to sin.

The answer is both yes and no. While being a slave to sin means that we may do bad things, sin is more than just a behavioral term. Sin is more than just what we do. The literal meaning of the word translated as sin is to miss the mark. The mark in this case, as it is the case throughout the New Testament, is God. Sin is missing God, separating from God. Sin is that which separates and leads us away from God. Sin keeps us from fully loving God and neighbor.

Likewise, when Paul talks about being a slave to righteousness, does that mean we just do all the right things: going to church, praying, reading the bible, serving on church committees, giving to the poor, working in the food pantry, visiting the sick? As a slave to righteousness, God makes me do all the right things.

Again, the answer is yes and no. Yes, we do all the right things but we may still miss the mark and remain separated from God. Righteousness, like sin, is not just a behavioral term. Righteousness is to get it right, to hit the mark. Fredrick Buechner makes this analogy. The piano student is at the piano having just finished the piece. His fingering had been perfect. He hit every note. Timing and rhythm were perfect. And the teacher says, "you didn't get it right." While he played the notes on the page correctly, he didn't get it right. He didn't make music, he played notes.

Righteousness is making music, not just playing the right notes. It is being drawn into a right relationship with God that comes from God's justifying grace. Through grace, amazing grace, God offered up the Son, Jesus, so we are bought out of slavery to sin. Hallelujah!! Praise the Lord!!

But wait, even if we are saved by God's justifying grace that does not mean we are righteous. If we stop there, simply reveling in the fact that we are saved, we are still missing the mark. We are like the piano student, playing the notes perfectly but not making music. We can be justified by God's grace but remain a slave to sin.

How can that be? Paul notes that you are slaves to the one that you obey. In the patronage system the servant gave complete obedience to the patron. You were a slave to the one you obeyed. Thus, even though one is saved by God's grace through Jesus Christ, you remain a slave to sin as you fail to obey God. You remain a slave to sin by rejecting the transformative power of God to change you, your attitudes, your feelings, your actions. You remain a slave to sin by saying God saved me from sin but then when God says I saved you for my work, we say no thanks.

That is one of the problems with American Christianity and the church today. We focus on our individual salvation, no longer being a slave to sin. We do not focus on being a slave to righteousness. We do not focus on the reality that no longer being a slave to sin and becoming a slave to righteousness means obeying God

and God's power to transform us. We obey God's call to change our attitudes toward others, particular those on the margins of society. It means obeying God by inviting, welcoming, and bringing all people into the church, particularly the lost, broken, and downtrodden. We obey God's irresistible power to bring us closer into the perfect love of God and for others, all others.

We obey God's desire for reconciliation throughout creation as we say to our African American brothers and sisters, forgive us that our ancestors enslaved your ancestors. We say to our Native America brothers and sisters, forgive us for the genocide of your ancestors. We say to our Hispanic brothers and sisters forgive us for exploiting you for cheap labor and not allowing participation in the American Dream.

Now I know many of you may say that was history, that wasn't me that did those things, but then we remain slaves to sin. Remember being a slave to righteousness is getting it right. It is about getting into a right relationship with God but also getting into a right relationship with our neighbor, for we cannot hate our neighbor and still claim to love God. So being a slave to righteousness means also doing what we can to heal the long standing, deep seeded attitudes toward others that keep us from fully loving them and bringing all into the unity of God's creation. It is about acknowledging our history of pain inflicted on others and working to heal that pain so that we all may be reconciled to each other and to God.

If we remain slaves to sin, we remain separated from God with the final consequence being death and total eternal separation from God.

But God through the justifying grace of the Son, Jesus, buys us from slavery to sin and frees us to be servants for righteousness. We are sanctified, made holy, to serve God and God's purpose to reconcile all people to God. We have been freed from sin so we may be obedient to God, to be God's servant for righteousness. Let us get it right. Let's get it right here at Trinity and in all our lives.