



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for Palm Sunday, April 2, 2023
“Good News: Set Free”
Speakers: Pastors Tom Grieb & Ashlee Adkins
Scripture: Romans 8:1-2

Palm Sunday (Tom)

The people who lined the streets the day of Christ’s Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem were looking for the Messiah who would free them from Roman domination. Jesus would free them alright. He would free them in a more profound way. He would free them from the hold sin had upon them.

Therefore

Whenever Paul uses the word “*therefore*” you usually find yourself at a hinge point. We encounter one of those hinge points in our passage for today from Romans 8:1-2.

Up to this point Paul has offered a carefully constructed argument about the reality of sin and God’s provision to overcome it. Of course, Jesus stands at the center of that. As we have said during this series about the good news that is ours in Christ: Jesus paves the way for our forgiveness and freedom.

Romans chapter 8 is considered one of the highpoints of the entire New Testament. It brings home what Paul longs to get across when it comes to that forgiveness and freedom. Verses 1-2 gets things started in triumphant fashion. Let’s hear these two great verses just now.

Romans 8:1-2

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

Who Will Deliver Me?

Just preceding this great passage Paul offers a bit about his own struggle. His struggle is our struggle.

“The very things I know I ought to do I don’t do,” he says. *“While the things I know I don’t need to be doing I do. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this dilemma?”* he asks.

He offers the answer borne out of his own experience, *“Thanks be to God it has been done in Christ Jesus my Lord.”*

Romans 7 was the scripture I used for the very first sermon I ever preached way back in high school. It seemed to summarize the dilemma I was in as well. I could certainly relate. There were things I knew I didn’t need to be doing yet I was all too quick to do them.

Conversely, there were things I knew I needed to be doing but wasn't doing them on a consistent basis. I needed help with such things and Jesus was there to provide it. Thank God, he rescued me from my dilemma then, and continues to do so to this day. I am thankful for the good news that is mine in Jesus Christ.

"Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

No Condemnation (Ashlee)

Romans 8 is one of my favorite books in the Bible. As a matter of fact, when I was in seminary our president taught a class called interiorization – a type of memorization process you went through to write the words of Scripture not only in your mind, but in your heart. During the class, I interiorized Romans 8. I couldn't have picked a better chapter. *"There is therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Have you ever noticed, or maybe you even have this perspective, that God sits on a throne far away and looks down upon us and judges us – waiting to throw lightning bolts or to orchestrate terrible things along our paths when we don't do the things we should do? We can sort of hear that's a dominant thought in our culture simply through the phrase "What did I do to deserve this? Why is God punishing me? Why did God allow this to happen?" I believe this is surely a thought for so many people who are grieving the loss of someone tragically passed or who have experienced an abrupt job loss or who just seems to be in a string of "bad luck."

But let's read this together. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

A few weeks ago, we had our first women's event in over 3 years and I tell you, I'm still being blessed from that event. It was such a wonderful night of discovery and fellowship. We were able to touch just the tip of the iceberg of the Enneagram which is a personality tool. One part we did not get to dig into was the triad of gut, heart, and mind. The way in which we respond and interact with the world around us. The gut types struggle with anger; the heart types deal with shame; and the mind types deal with fear. Perhaps you deal with anger because life seems like too much at times – and you express it outwardly through hitting back, backing off completely, or trying to fix it. Maybe you deal with shame because of the way you believe people perceive you – especially the way God sees you. So you lean in and try to be helpful to overcome your shame, you play whatever role you believe will go over the best, or you lean into yourself to be the special person you know you want to be. Or perhaps fear if your underlying response when the world seems too much. So you learn more and more and try to become more wise gathering all the information you can, or maybe you find security or take foolish risks to overcome your fear, or lastly, maybe you escape to deny and avoid pain from a harsh reality that's too much to handle.

Wherever you find yourself leaning, whether shame, fear, or anger – there is only one way to freedom. And there is only one truth that will set you free. You cannot earn your salvation, nor can you lose it when you are in Christ Jesus. When you find yourself trying to earn God's love, or living into your coping mechanism of anger, shame, or fear, remember you are living under the law of sin and death and not the Spirit who gives life. You are trying to be God. Knock yourself off the throne and accept the gift Jesus is offering you. The gift of freedom, the gift of salvation, the gift of true life.

Set Free (Tom)

Paul writes this at the very end of Romans 7, as if to set the stage for what's to come. *"So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."* (Romans 7:25)

Paul is well-aware of the hold sin has upon our lives. He likens it to being enslaved. The good news is that in Jesus, *“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* He *“sets us free from the law of sin and death.”* We are no longer slaves to sin.

In fact, the power of sin was broken by what Jesus did on the cross. He paid the supreme price to give us the opportunity not only to be forgiven, but free. In Christ, we are redeemed. Redemption has its roots in the price paid for a slave to be freed. A price was paid, and the slave was freed. The price for our freedom is none other than the life of Christ himself.

- That should humble us to no end.
- It should put us to thinking about the expanse of his love.
- And cause to seek him out for our own redemption.

There is no sweeter place in this life than to be forgiven and free. To once and for all be released from the things that we have done and then put on a path that frees us to be who God wants us to be is wonderful indeed.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

This is good news for those who give their lives to Jesus and accept the freedom he offers from *“sin and death.”*

We have quoted it throughout this series. It is that great passage from Romans 3:23-24. *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* (Romans 3:24-24)

We have talked about being justified, which is, in so many words, a matter of being made right with God. Justification is what God does **for** us at the time of salvation.

It is, of course, is a matter of grace, the gift of God’s love toward each of us. We are redeemed. We have been set free, and the cost of that freedom comes at the expense of Christ’s life on the cross.

As tough as that is to consider, much less grasp, it is good news to those who are being saved.

Introduction to the Table (Ashlee)

Three of my favorite verses come later in chapter 8: v.15 For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. And then in 38-29 – For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We come to this table to remember. To be reminded. We are children of God. Nothing can separate us from his love, from his gifts. We need to be reminded because wow, don’t we forget as we live in our day to day. We aren’t bound by sin, we aren’t controlled by our anger, our shame, our fear. We have all the power of Jesus Christ living within us – don’t we know that if we lived with that truth as the forefront of our minds, bodies, and spirits that this world would look differently. Let’s get ourselves ready for the table today. Let’s truly surrender ourselves to the truth that there is therefore no condemnation for US who are in Christ Jesus.