

Sermon for August 3rd, 2025
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 2:7-17

7 then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. **8** And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **10** A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. **11** The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. **12** And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. **13** The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. **14** And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. **15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Psalms 33:1-12

1 Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!
Praise befits the upright.
2 Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
3 Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
4 For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
5 He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
6 By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
7 He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
8 Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
9 For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.
10 The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
11 The counsel of the LORD stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.
12 Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

Romans 6:19-23

19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented

your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **22** 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. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mark 8:1-10

1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, **2** “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. **3** And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” **4** And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” **5** And he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” **6** And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. **7** And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. **8** And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. **9** And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. **10** And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Our text for meditation this Seventh Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Today's passage has a different voice than it used to. It does not *hit* the way that it did five hundred years ago, or even a *thousand* years ago. The early Church read it differently than we do, the Reformers read it differently than we do – and as far as I can see, St. Paul himself, writing the book of Romans, looked back at the final draft of his tome and read it back to himself, seeing it vastly differently than we do today. Beloved, Christians were quietly listening to this passage and finding themselves edified by it, enjoying the simple and beneficial message without raising a fuss. But today, we hear it and risk feeling a dreadful sense of *despair*.

It is not that the *meaning* has changed. A small child could understand it. Simply put, we were once bad but now we are good, because Jesus saved us; now, because Jesus saved us, we should do good instead of bad. It is that simple. Sin destroys, so why sin? We used to be slaves to sin before we became Christians, but now we see that sin leads to death so we ought to avoid it. In generations past, believers heard those words, took them to heart, and did their best to please the God who saved them by being better day by day.

Us moderns though... like I said, it hits different. Something is getting in the way of it, making us feel defensive, argumentative, irritated, sad, and ultimately afflicted with a sense of creeping, ugly dread. Perhaps not all of us feel this way. I certainly used to, and I have spoken to people who still have this despairing response, and it seems that modernity is doing us no favors. And why is this the case? Because we are frustrated with a seeming inability to stop certain sins, and our vocabularies have changes in the past hundred or so years to reflect this. We don't talk about habits, we talk about addictions. We don't talk about personalities, we talk about psychological conditions. The development of culture surrounding psychology has rendered us feeling powerless and unchanged by the Gospel. Unfortunately, the Church has played along with these changes.

A Curious New Voice

Before I wrote this sermon, I did some research. Nowhere does Luther talk about addiction. The Church Fathers use words like “addict” and “addicted,” but they typically reserve such words for relatively benign concepts like being prone to *reading*. While the Reformers talk about a sin nature, or original sin, that inspires us to transgress, they do not countenance the medical terminology of our day. Back then, if you had a particular sin that you found yourself committing over and over again, or if you had the same problems with lust that Augustine had, then you simply did your best. Because of sin dwelling in us, of course we will find ourselves sinning over and over again; the solution is to get back up each time, hear the words of absolution, and try again. You only find a concept of “sinless perfectionism” among the monastic writers, and truth be told we can safely ignore their nonsense; everyone else just talked about the need to continue on seeking to get better over time – with the Holy Spirit's help of course, we call that *sanctification* or becoming more holy and righteous. Today though, we are treated to a new voice that responds whenever we hear passages like these, an *accusatory* voice.

St. Paul says,

present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

But the new voice replies,

Dear St. Paul, I cannot! I continue to (insert sin here, whether it is pornography, fornication, drug use, drunkenness, etc.). Does this mean that I remain a slave to impurity?

St. Paul says,

20 For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But the new voice replies,

These sins lead to death, yet no matter how hard I try I continue in them. Woe is me, must I perish?

St. Paul says,

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But the new voice replies,

All I have done is sin – surely this means I merit death!

You see beloved, there are countless people out there who are feeling a dour weight of despair – and is it because they keep sinning? No, for the Church has proclaimed absolution for centuries. It is not their sin, but their belief that they are *addicts*, hopelessly doomed to continue compulsively repeating the same sins forever until they are tossed into the lake of fire. They feel this way because they are listening to the devil and the world, who preach an *anti-Gospel* to them.

Answering the New Voice

Dear Christian, the Word of God says you *were* a slave of sin. The devil and the world say you *are* a slave of sin. The Word proclaims that you have been set free from sin to start serving God. The world and the devil says that because you still transgress, any such freedom is an illusion. You see, the world has offered up this new understanding of our sinful habits, calling them *conditions* that must be accepted as something inherent to our identities. The world says you are not just a man who likes beer and should watch out against drunkenness – oh no, actually you are an *alcoholic* who will always be an alcoholic even if you haven't gotten drunk in ten years. The world says that you are not someone with a healthy sexuality which must be expressed in marriage – no, actually you are a *porn addict* who must live in constant fear of his own body for his whole life.

There is some truth to the concept of addiction. A hard drug like heroin is powerfully addictive, isn't it? Someone gets started on it, and before you know it the sensations the drug provides are all he can think about. But what is addiction? It is a chronic, habitual impulse to engage in a behavior or to partake in a substance. For example, let's say our friend Bill uses heroin; after he gets started, he will be

burdened with impulses that encourage him to do it more. But the world and the devil both have played a trick on us all by claiming that Bill *is* what he *feels*, or that he is how he sees himself. Bill is not a man who experiences those habitual impulses – the world proclaims that he *is* his addiction. He is no longer Bill the man, but Bill the junkie. And if Bill isn't a Christian, chances are he will like his drug enough to accept the label and find himself laid out in the street with all the people like him.

But what if Bill becomes a Christian, having heard that Jesus died for his sins and rose again so he could live eternally *without* the heroin? Does God see him as Bill the junkie? Is *that* the label that our Lord would give him? Of course not! Bill is justified by *faith* in our Lord Jesus; when our heavenly Father looks at the man, he only sees the perfect righteousness of Christ who shed His blood to cover those sins. Even if Bill relapses a month after his Baptism and does heroin, if he goes to our Lord for forgiveness and trusts in the mercy offered to him, God shall not think of him as an apostate or slave of sin. Bill *was* a slave of sin. He *was* a junkie. But now, even though he might struggle with those impulses to go do the drug, God says he is *free*.

Freedom in Christ

Our reading is received differently in the modern era because we have forgotten that it is about how God sees us. Neither you nor I nor the devil nor the world have any power to change what our Lord has declared – and He has declared that believers are no longer slaves of sin. If you believe in Christ, then you are free from sin. The Apostle is saying that we should do our best to live the way God sees us; if He says that Bill is not a slave to sin, then Bill should do his best to live that way, and work on avoiding his former drug use. Someone who has a bad drinking habit, drink less! A woman who slept around, she should find a husband! Let us live our lives with the penitent faith that results in looking the way God sees us. But let us not think for even one moment that our Lord shall abandon us just because we are still struggling. For His love, which endures forever, shall always say to us that we are *free*. Let us rejoice in that freedom, and strive to live according to it.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.