

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
June 28, 2020 4th Sunday after Pentecost
207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Words of Welcome

There are words that we just don't like to hear, and in our social climate right now some of the words the Bible uses to describe things make us just want to go on to another scripture or just ignore what is being said, or forget about faith period. Words like sin, wickedness, death, slaves, obedience, righteousness. Yet these words are only part of the story. We can come to understand these words in the context of God's love and compassion. Stay with me a while, and let see if together we can bring life from words that seem dead.

Call to Worship

God calls us by name
into the presence of holiness
as God's holy people.
We answer this call
by the grace of God
through the power of the Holy Spirit
in the name of God's own Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.
Come, let us worship God.

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Hymn

Jesus, life of all the world

776

1. Jesus, life of all the world, source and sum of all creation,
Song of God and Son of Man, only hope of oursalvation,
Living Word for all our need, life you give is life indeed!
2. Life of freedom, gladness, truth, all our guilt and fear transcending;
life that leaps beyond the grave, God's own life that knows no ending;
life eternal, gift unpriced, freely ours in Jesus Christ!
3. Yours is life that makes us stand firm for truth, all wrong defying;
yours the strength by which we strive, on your holy arm relying;
yours the war we wage on sin, yours the power by which we win.
4. Jesus, life of all the world, you are Lord of every nation;
by your Holy Spirit's power make your Church your incarnation
till our lives of truth and grace show our world your human face!

"Jesus, life of all the world," words by Margaret Clarkson Music: Katholisches Gesangbuch
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Opening Prayer

Lord God, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

From north and south, from east and west, drawn by your majesty we come to worship you, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

For the gift of this new day, fresh from your hand, we rejoice.

For the renewal we discover in your friendship in Christ, we praise you.

In the Spirit's energy, blessing us in each moment, whether joyous or difficult, we place our hopes.

Lord God, we trust that all of life is your gift so, give us glimpses of your splendor, glory and love in this time of worship as your word is opened up to us and our praise to you shared through prayer, word, and song.

Forgive our sin and the decisions we make that lead to injustice and pain to ourselves and others instead of healing and wholeness. Teach us what obedience to you means instead of obedience to our own human desires, and in that, may we come to know freedom, holiness, and life in you through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Your sins are forgiven by the mercy of Christ. *Rom. 6:18, 23*

Be at peace, for you have been freed from sin

that you may serve with righteousness,

to the glory and praise of God.

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Scripture Reading Romans 6:12-23

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do 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? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end

of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Freedom to live

I am going to jump straight to the hardest word to get past in this reading – slaves. In our current climate of social activism and Black Lives Matter this word gets in the way of anything we may want to say about the word as the Apostle Paul would have understood it. As one writer put it, “In our day and age, the word ‘slavery’ calls to mind 300 years of social sin and evil, and we want nothing to do with it.”¹ But there it is. Eight times the word “slaves” is used with one variation of being enslaved. None of us wants anything to do with being slaves or being told we are slaves. It is an archaic and antiquated idea. Yet, we know that this idea is not so far from us as we might like to think.

For starters the ramifications of centuries of slavery are still being felt daily by many black people. Beyond that we are aware that people around the globe are in fact in some way being used as slaves, we just don’t name it in that way. The word exploitation is used instead and widely. There are people who are in forced labour, marriages, sex trade workers, people paid little to nothing to sew our clothes, pick our fruits and vegetables, do construction, or work for the state. It is all a kind of slavery.

In more cliché way of speaking, you may hear people say that someone is a slave to money, fashion, the grind, or love. In other words, their lives, their decisions seem to be dictated by their desire to have more of something. Slavery can come in the form of addiction to substances or behaviours that make life unmanageable. Many times, these choices lead to a death that is not necessarily physical, but may be an emotional, social, or spiritual death. This all comes across as pretty depressing, but the fact is people seem to have something inside them that drives them, for good or ill, and the consequences can depreciate or destroy the quality of your life.

Yet, can it be that the passage we heard today with all its talk about slavery and obedience can actually point us in a direction that gives us the freedom to live a life that is more than we could have hoped for or imagined given our circumstances? Even if you think you are very healthy in all aspects of your life, would you want to know that there is a way of being that can add a depth to your existence that you have not yet experienced?

The scripture reading for today landed us in the middle of Paul’s exhortation about the grace of God in Jesus Christ who transforms believers from an old way of being into a

¹ Monroe, Shawnthea. Feasting on the Word: Year A Volume3 Pentecost and Season After Pentecost. Editors David L. Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville. 2010. P182.

new way of being in the world. All of this talk of sin and slavery is getting to the heart of what it means to let go of what the world offers and be freed from the shame, loneliness, unhappiness, discontent, or addiction that is so prevalent and instead find joy, purpose, and satisfaction. It is not about bad things no longer happening. Bad things, unpleasant, uncomfortable, and even painful experiences are part of the human condition. What changes is our living in it. You become free to, as they say, let go and let God.

When Paul is talking about slavery, he is talking about giving to God your ultimate allegiance, loyalty, obedience, and service. You surrender your life to God. So, what is the difference between surrendering to our own desires or to God? Many people seem to be doing just fine taking care of their needs, what will God do for anyone? We can think, choose, and do for ourselves just fine thank you very much.

Let's think of it this way. When my children were growing up and particularly as teenagers, if they did not want to do something that their friends were doing but needed a gracious way to get out of it, they had my permission to say that I wouldn't let them go or do what the others were doing. They had to let me know that they had used me for their alibi, but it allowed them to do the right thing without a struggle. Shawnthea Monroe say that, "This is the strange yet wonderful logic of Paul's theology of salvation. God is on our side and has our best interests at heart. If we devote ourselves to God's will, God will lead us to abundant life."²

You may have to adjust your idea of abundant life though. Abundant life is more about relationship than it is about acquiring things. If your idea of abundant life only goes as far as the toys you have for the lake, the house, or stuff, from vehicles, to materials, to fishing tackle, clothing, ability to travel or eat out, then you may be disappointed. It is not that you cannot or will not have those things as well, but it is about what has your heart.

If your heart is rooted in Christ then you will put more value on who you love and how you love than what you love. You will care more about the person who is struggling and in need of support than the latest gadget. It will be because you genuinely care, and not out of some sense of false duty or guilt. When you have freedom to live it is about grace, love, hope, joy, and these things in abundance.

When we are slaves to things the wage is a kind of death. We work all day and feel empty, we do things or use things and still there is a void. When you become obedient to God and this obedience takes root in the heart it has the power to transform our entire being, and in time, we find that we are living more and more into the life that God has always wanted for us. A full life in which you are filled to overflowing and love, grace, joy, and hope overflow from you into the lives of others.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. That eternal life has its beginnings in our lives right now. How we live, move, and have our being in this time and place and with the people that come and go in our lives

² Ibid. P184.

means something, has value. When we listen for God's wisdom, live trusting that God is present and desires the best for us, we live life differently, and our hearts overflow with abundance for living. We have the freedom to live the way we were created to live, in relationship, with love, grace, and compassion.

We do it all in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Lord God of heaven and earth, with joy and thanksgiving, we praise you for you create, sustain, and redeem all things. For making us in your image to love one another and to care for your creation, we give you thanks. For the gift of your Son whose life is the pattern for our lives and learning, we give you thanks. For the energy of your Spirit to inspire us in times of challenge and change, we give you thanks.

Strengthen us in these difficult days to show your love to others as we pray for the church and those who lead it as we adapt to new ways of worshiping and being together...

For creation that we may learn reverence and care for it...

For those who lead in the nations of the world that they may work for the well-being of the most vulnerable...

For those who serve as teachers, healers and caregivers in these stressful days when their work is so demanding...

For the poor, the homeless, the hungry and all whose livelihoods have been disrupted during the pandemic...

For those who are ill or struggling in isolation, and for those who mourn the loss of someone dear...

For the powerless and the oppressed in all places and for those who work to defend them...

Hear us now as we pray in silence for situations on our hearts this day.

God eternal, keep us in communion with your people across all times and in all places. May we serve you faithfully, blessing others as we have been blessed by your love through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together.

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Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Invitation to make an offering

When Christ is at work in our lives, we desire to obey God, not because it is mandatory, but because our hearts have been changed. The act of making an offering is rooted in that change of heart. When God's own love is overflowing in us generosity toward others becomes part of our living.

©Joyce Yanishewski written for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A. June 28, 2020.

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Responding to our experience of God comes in a variety of ways, in this moment we respond with singing...

Hymn

Lift up your hearts/Sing Hallelujah

526

1. Lift up your hearts unto the Lord;
lift up your hearts unto the Lord.
Sing hallelujah, sing hallelujah;
lift up your hearts unto the Lord!
2. In Christ the world has been redeemed...
3. His resurrection sets us free...
4. Therefore, we celebrate the feast...
5. Sing hallelujah to the Lord...

Words: public domain

Benediction

You have been given the spirit of freedom
and saved for the sake of God's love.
Freely share that love in the world,
knowing that the reward of right relationship
is holiness and life eternal.

May the One who creates, redeems,
and sustains you from everlasting to everlasting
grant you the grace of peace, holiness, and eternal life.

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