

26 June 2023, The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost: Romans 6:1b-11 (Proper 7)

We know that our old self was crucified with (Christ) so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him (Romans 6:6-8).

I once saw a one-panel cartoon of people at party chatting. One person says to another, “I don’t think I’ve actually died to sin, but I do feel queasy from time to time.” The ideas of sin-sickness, dying with Christ, dying to sin, being raised with Christ in our mortal lives can sound strange, far-fetched, even impossible. Paul writes of a very deep reality however difficult it is to comprehend. The obvious question is: if we have died with Christ, died to sin, no longer enslaved by sin, why do we keep sinning? Paul knows this predicament; in Roman 7:9, 11 he writes: *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. So, I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.*

Have we not all experienced this, some of us habitually. This double-minded, double-heartedness is especially troublesome for us products of the 20th and 21st centuries because we naïvely assume we can think our way out of the problem. While our thinking minds are involved the sickness is spiritual, not just rational; therefore spiritual solutions are needed for our healing. Paul exclaimed: *Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!* (Romans 7:24-25)

Let’s dive yet deeper into the reality of God’s love for us. We can see our life in Christ as a kind of snapshot—frozen in time, maybe frozen for all time, presuming the snapshot is who we are indefinitely. We can believe the lie that our past is insurmountable, making our future unredeemable. Others may be fixed on the notion of ‘instant conversion.’ That is, once we decide to be followers of Jesus no longer ought sin be a difficulty, and if it is, sin’s presence indicates we were not really converted in the first place. Such presumptions are more than unhelpful; they are silly, arrogant, and not Biblical. Consider carefully the verb tenses in the verse from today’s Epistle: *We know that our old self was crucified with (Christ)—past tense—so that the body of sin might be destroyed—future possibility—and we might no longer be enslaved to sin—future possibility—...if we have died with Christ,—passive past tense—we believe that we will also live with him—future continuous tense.* Christ on the cross has freed us from the bondage of sin, a reality we may claim and live into in the present and future. Perhaps this way of saying will be helpful: our salvation pre-dates us—Christ on the cross for our salvation. Our salvation post-dates us—we will abide with Christ into eternity. Today, we are ‘works in progress.’ Today is what we have, and spiritual progress more times than not involves doing simple things well, repeatedly, and consistently.

To pray, worship, study, and do works of mercy well, repeatedly, and consistently is what living in Christ looks like. Our progress in Christ is not so much what we think but what we do. Or as the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous has it: “The spiritual life is not a theory; it must be lived.” Our daily prayer, regular engaged worship, study of the Scriptures and holy authors, and practical works of mercy are the sure foundation upon which sin cannot take root. Prayer, worship, study, and mercy-in-action keep us moving forward, unbinds us from past sins, frees us to receive grace today, and anticipates a future of continued growth in Christ. Prayer, worship, study, and practical mercy are hope in action that despite our sins, Jesus has and will deliver us from sin and death, as in Jesus we *walk in newness of life*, that even when we fail, because God’s love for us in Christ is stronger than sin and death, we yet consider ourselves *dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*.

Brothers and sisters, the result of our sin stands no chance against the power of God’s love for us in Jesus. We die to sin as we, through faith, surrender the ways of spiritual death—our sins—and live in newness of life; Christ’s life alive and living in us. The Holy Spirit helping us, in prayer, worship, study, and mercy-in-action, we are being raised with Christ.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and for ever. Amen.