

GOD CONTINUES TO GIVE HIS GIFTS: SERMON, TRINITY VII

Hear again the Word of God for this seventh Sunday after Trinity:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is life eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Collect of the Day for today sums up the sentiments and truths of the passage we have from St. Paul to the Romans for this week. As it was prayed, did you note the following as your petition?

“We beseech You, graciously abide among us with Your blessing, and keep us from covetousness and the cares of this life...” (Dietrich Collect for Trinity VII).

Those words, which are yours to own, displays to the Church the Source of blessings - all good and gracious gifts - and the One who has power to keep us from desiring the evil in which the world, the devil and our sinful flesh desires to live. This One Source desires to free all humans from the tyranny of sin, and gifts to all who believe the freedom of eternal life.

Truly, this time of year is suited to remembering that God is the One Who continues to give His gifts. When Americans traditionally take to the picnic grounds or other places to celebrate the independence of this great nation, it is a good time to remember that freedom comes at a price. That is, for we who are blessed to live in this

¹ Romans 6:23.

land, the blood price of the Continental revolutionaries over 230 years ago brought freedom to this nation.

But, even more so for Christians, it is a time that we may recall that true, lasting eternal freedom from mankind's greatest enemies, sin, death and the devil, was also won by the blood of a revolutionary.

That Jesus died as an insurrectionist, a revolutionary of the first century AD, is displayed by the method of His execution. The cross, as you may well remember, was the chosen instrument of punishment for those in ancient Rome who had committed capital crimes. In particular, it was reserved for non-citizens, such as Jesus, who had been determined to have been leaders of revolutions against the rule of the Emperor.

What this means, dear Christian, is that when you think about the emblems that signify your freedom, you are free to view the image of the Son of God and Mary hanging lifeless on the cross as your victory trophy. Here, in the icon of victory the crucified Insurrectionist - Jesus was such a one in His rebellion against the Prince of the Power of this fallen world - here is the blood price recalled and held high to bring peace, comfort and the remembrance of God's gracious gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation for you.

It is the image of the Crucified Rebel, the Killed Christ, that moves behind the words of the Apostle for this week of remembrance. As St. Paul dictated his words to Christians, first at Rome who would hear them read aloud, and then into the whole world, the cross and the victory Jesus won upon it stood boldly behind the declarations you heard today. Our text begins:

“Humanly I continue to speak on account of the weakness of the flesh of all of you. For, just as all of you presented your members as slaves to uncleanness and by lawlessness into lawlessness, thus now all of you must present your members as slaves to righteousness into holiness.”²

St. Paul speaks of what all believers once were, and what they now are. That is, all were once captive, slaves, to sin, and in sin to all works that were outside God’s Holy Law. All who are outside the family of God, even those who have attempted to reach God by other religions, may only be said to be unclean in the sight of God. They, you and I before the Word of the Lord came in, with and under the Water of Holy Baptism, were unable to do anything right in His sight, either in this life, or into life eternal.

As you will recall, to be unclean in God’s Presence is to be unable to approach Him. The unclean cannot exist in the presence of God. It must be purified, made clean – declared clean by God – so that it may not be consumed by the cleansing fire of His holiness.

² Romans 6:19.

Further, as many of those who would come into the Church would come outside the pale of Judaism, Paul also ties to uncleanness before God the concept of being outside the Holy Law. Those who had no hearing, let alone understanding or faith in the Torah, would only be found having lives that were leading to more lawless thoughts, words and deeds.

Both the uncleanness and lawlessness of those outside the faith are shown to merit nothing before God, nothing that is, other than that which all humans deserve on account of our being children of Adam – death. That is to say that no one can earn the grace of God, or His gifts, no matter how much one may strive. There is no such thing, according to the revealed Word of God, as the person who can merit the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life by his or her own self-righteous works. God's favor is not to be earned, it is a gift. It cannot be bought; it can only be received.

Since this grace, love and favor of God are His gifts to give, and since He has given them to you, you are free to use them to His glory. Since Christ shed His blood into death to pay the wages your sins deserved, and since freedom, true freedom from bondage to sin is His gift to you, you are then called to exercise this freedom in ways that follow His Word. God is calling you, as a response to His gifts, to walk in true Christian repentance. He is speaking about total repentance and the good works

and new life it produces. So, how have you been doing in living your life in total repentance and the good words and new life it produces?

If you are still mortal among us, you are failing daily. You, dear Christian, are at war in yourself. If you are not, beware, for you may be falling into the trap of the devil – the myth that you may become without sin in this life, purely sanctified, and in no need of the teaching of God’s convicting, condemning and crucifying Law.

On the other hand, *“Paul asserts in Romans 6 that Christ’s death ‘on our behalf frees us not only from the ‘penalty’ of sin but from the ‘power’ of sin also.” This means a true “subduing (of) the power of sin...Sin’s tyranny is broken... for the person who is ‘in Christ...’”³*

Therefore, you who are free in Christ are free indeed – to bind yourselves in thought, word and deed to the will of God, as slaves who are members of His household. This freedman-slavery is unique to Christendom. Our Master is neither harsh, nor unfair, nor unkind, nor unloving.

That is shown in the Master’s gifts of food for the 4,000 in this week’s Gospel reading. It had been declared in the week’s Old Testament narrative that reminded us that God the Master granted food, good food in plenty without tedious work, to our father Adam in the Garden. The Master of those who are His followers in

³ Barker, Kenneth, ed. The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary. Romans 1-8, by Douglas Moo. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

the faith gives His gifts freely without any work on their part. They are given to show us, as His bondservants, tied to Him by the blood of the Son and the life-breath of the Spirit, that we are now able to walk in newness of life.

What this means, dear Christians, unlike any other followers of any other gods in heaven, on earth or under the earth, you are free to daily repent of your sins. That means that you do not just sorrow over them, but truly turn from sin and walk in newness of life.

Christian liberty, *“is not a license, a freedom to do what one wills, but a freedom to dedicate oneself to Christ, motivated by faith and (God’s sacrificial) love, which proceeds ‘from the heart’ (of God imputed to you through the Word) and which is open to seeking the good of others.”*⁴ It is a fulfilling of the first and second Tables of the Law, loving God above all others and loving one’s neighbor as oneself.

There are really only two conditions for humans: slaves of Christ or slaves of sin. That the faithful may know what they have left behind when their bonds of slavery to sin were removed and their blood hewn velvet chains to God were linked to Him, the Apostle continues. He speaks of what you, I and all Christians once were, before we heard the Word and believed on Christ Jesus and Him crucified for our sins:

⁴ Albright, William Foxwell and Freedman, David Noel, eds. The Anchor Bible. Vol. 33, Romans, by Joseph Fitzmyer. (New York: Doubleday, 1993). 450-51.

*"For when all of you were slaves of sin, you all were free to righteousness."*⁵

*"Paul asserts once more how false a freedom the freedom to sin is and how true a freedom the enslavement to God is... "The slaves of sin were free 'in respect to righteousness;' they could and did ignore the will of God..."*⁶

That is no true eternal freedom, and it is no real freedom in this life either,
as the Word goes on to explain:

*"What fruit then did you all have by the things of which all of you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."*⁷

St. Paul is as much saying, *"as long as one takes delight in sin (no matter how subtly) and inwardly desires its furtherance, one secretly hopes for some gain from sin, forbidden though it may be... But where one sees the final consequence of sin as death, there sins' disguise of delight is defrocked and exposed as utter shamefulness."*⁸ Sin is an harsh taskmaster, as lord who gives only the minimum, with "benefits" that are useful only in this life – and that is a ruse. Sin, brings with it only ruin, and death, eternal separation from the love of God, and knowing that one, by rejecting Him, has earned all the punishment that comes forever.

That is the contrast between sin as master and God as Master. Sin pays what is due; God gives what cannot be earned. Continued enslavement to sin brings death and hell; continued enslavement to God brings life and heaven. To help believers from

⁵ Romans 6:20.

⁶ Franzmann, Martin. *Romans: A Commentary*. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 119.

⁷ Romans 6:21

⁸ Gasque, W. Ward, ed. *New International Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 6, *Romans*, by James Edwards. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). 175.

all generations of the New Testament era, the words of St. Paul may be summed up with words like these: there is *“one basic theme (in this pericope, that is), the Christian’s freedom from sin’s tyranny or lordship.”*⁹

That good news, that God continues to give His gifts, is the treasure found in the last phrase of this week’s epistle. Hear it again,

*“But now, all of you being freed from sins, and now enslaved to God, all of you continue to have your fruit into holiness, and (in) the end, life eternal. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is life eternal in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*¹⁰

This *“brings the entire chapter to a fitting climax...the death sin produces is ‘merited,’ in contrast to the ‘eternal life’ from God, which is a ‘free gift...’”*¹¹ The taskmaster, sin, gives only subsistence wages, that is for this life of service only. The Master, the Triune God, grants eternal rewards, for now and into eternity. You are free under God’s gift to stop earning the wages of sin.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Trinity VII (LUTHERAN SERVICE BOOK One-year series)

Genesis 2:7-17; Romans 6:19-23; Mark 8:1-9

July 6, 2008

Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Additional Notes:

367. ⁹ Barker, Kenneth, ed. The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary. Romans 1-8, by Douglas Moo. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Romans 6:22-23.

¹¹ Barker, Kenneth, ed. The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary. Romans 1-8, by Douglas Moo. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991).

This section was quoted against the Reformers by Rome in order to show there was a history of satisfactions for sin in the Church. The Evangelical response to this was, “thus they superstitiously imagined that satisfactions were valid not for discipline in the church, but for placating God.”¹²

“In a word, there is no penitence inwardly which does not produce outwardly the punishing of the flesh...When Christ says (Matt. 4:17), ‘be penitent,’ he is surely talking about total penitence and total newness of life and fruits. He is not talking about those hypocritical satisfactions which the scholastics imagine avail as a payment for the punishments of purgatory or other punishments even when they come from men in mortal sin.”¹³

“Here our opponents reply that eternal life is called a reward and that therefore it is merited by the merit of condignity through good works...Paul calls eternal life a ‘gift; (Rom. 6:23) because the righteousness bestowed on us for Christ’s sake at the same time makes us sons of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17), as John says (John 3:36), ‘He who believes in the Son has eternal life.’ Augustine says, as do many later writers, ‘God crowns His gifts in us.’”¹⁴

“Everything which prepares and fits man for damnation emanates from the devil and man through sin, and in no way from God. Since God does not want any man to be damned, how could he prepare man for his damnation? The only cause of man’s damnation is sin, for the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).”¹⁵

Regarding *σαρξ/ασθενεια*: “depict what it is to be human apart from God and His Spirit...the service of righteousness should be undertaken with all the single-minded dedication that characterized our pre-Christian service of idols like self, money, lust, pleasure and power.”¹⁶

“But, ‘holiness,’ while achieved in one sense (cf. I Cor. 6:11; Eph. 5:26), is a way of living or state that is the Christian’s duty yet to achieve. (cf. I Thess. 4:3; 5:23; II Thess. 2:13)... normally designates the process of becoming holy... The imperative ‘grows out of, and reflects, the ‘indicative.’”¹⁷

“The aorist passive participles...depict this new subservience as a status already attained in the past.” (re. *ελευθερωοεντες* and *δουλωθεντες*).¹⁸

v.23 “brings the entire chapter to a fitting climax...the death sin produces is ‘merited,’ in contrast to the ‘eternal life’ from God, which is a ‘free gift...’”¹⁹

“live out the meaning of justification in their lives.”

v.20: play on slave and free;

v.21: *τελος* – as in sense of goal;

v. 23: *οψονιον* – “ration (money) paid to a soldier.”²⁰

¹² Tappert, Theodore, ed. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) 200.

¹³ Ibid. 202.

¹⁴ Ibid. 161.

¹⁵ Ibid. 629.

¹⁶ Barker, Kenneth, ed. The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary. Romans 1-8, by Douglas Moo. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991). 420.

¹⁷ Ibid. 421.

¹⁸ Ibid. 424.

¹⁹ Ibid. 425.

"Sin is a tyrant who pays the stipulated soldiers' pay, no more, no less; the wages sins pays is death..."²¹

"Paul would risk offense to the sacred in order to communicate the sacred to the secular."²²

αγιασμος: "Means 'holiness,' 'consecration,' or 'sanctification'... The debate whether Paul intends a process of sanctification or an end result is ultimately an artificial distinction and foreign to Paul's thought... summarize the transition from sin to salvation." (re. vv. 20-22).²³

"Only righteousness truly frees because it leads away from self and to 'holiness' (v. 19)...(v.23)The imagery of fruit (NIV, 'benefits') is here abandoned for the military imagery of verse 13...'subsistence payments to soldiers.'"²⁴

"Paul commended the Romans for being ashamed of sin, but 'the multitude of Christians are now ashamed of sanctification.'"²⁵

²⁰ Albright, William Foxwell and Freedman, David Noel, eds. The Anchor Bible. Vol. 33, Romans, by Joseph Fitzmyer. (New York: Doubleday, 1993). 451.

²¹ Franzmann, Martin. Romans: A Commentary. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1986), 119.

²² Gasque, W. Ward, ed. New International Biblical Commentary. Vol. 6, Romans, by James Edwards. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992). 173.

²³ Ibid. 174.

²⁴ Ibid. 175.

²⁵ Ibid. 176.