

We Belong to God

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year A: Pentecost 5: Mt 10:40-42, Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10 “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.”

Romans 6 Therefore, 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.

Just as our country was set free from British rule in 1783, we are set free from sin through Christ’s death and resurrection. We belong to God. We don’t belong to sin anymore. We belong to God. Therefore, we continue to live for God. This grace pulls us closer and closer to Christ, conforming our lives to His.

God’s grace and peace to you, beloved of God! Amen.

This week on Tuesday, we celebrate the 4th of July. We honor the day when our forefathers in the Continental Congress voted to adopt the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, 1776. The revolutionary war itself didn’t end until 1783, but we give thanks for all who fought for freedom from Britain’s rule. Once freedom was gained, do you think there were any who said, “Let go back to war again. Let’s go back to fighting and death and destruction and pain!”

Of course not. Once there is freedom, there is no need to return to days of war.

Another analogy. Say you quit your job. You're done and it's over. But then you keep going back. You put your things in the locker. You park in your old parking spot. You go back to the office. You begin sending emails and taking phone calls.

But it doesn't work. Because management changed your passwords. Your colleagues don't invite you to meetings anymore because you're not supposed to be working. The office manager can't decide if she should talk to you before or after calling security. (Mary Hinkle Shore. Workingpreacher.org. Commentary for Romans 6. July 2, 2023)

We can't go back to old jobs that we've walked away from. Paul writes in Romans, we can't go back to our old selves. We've been freed from sin. Now we belong to God. For Paul, sin is not a moral imperfection. Sin is not separation or brokenness. Sin is an enslaving power that continues to pull us to that which is not life-giving or of God. *'Sin is a power that vies with the Creator for control of creation to such an extent that Paul can speak of humanity's having been "enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6).'* (repeat)

(<https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-13/commentary-on-romans-612-23-6>)

It's helpful, I think, to reflect on sin as a power that pulls us and vies for our attention. If you've been around a small child, you know what this feels like.

"Mommy, mommy I need this!"

"Daddy, daddy, listen! Listen, Daddy!"

"Just a minute, please. I'm talking."

"But Daddy, daddy, listen! Listen! Watch me! I want this, I need this."

Their self-absorption and inability to wait is not a moral imperfection on their part. It is a stage of their development. Yet theirs is a strong power that vies for our attention. Sin is like that.

Sin says, "Hey, look at me! Listen to me! Watch me. I'm shiny. I'm more interesting than what you've got. I promise I'm more fulfilling than God."

In history and modern day, those who enslave other humans, control when people eat, what they wear, and the hours they work. Slaves do not have power and lose all control over their lives. This is like death for the enslaved. This is like sin.

If we think of sin as a moral imperfection, then we can be pulled into the delusion that we somehow have power over our sin. “Oh, I have to do better.” “I’ll just try harder this week.”

No. Only Christ had power over sin. The love that sent Jesus to the cross broke the power of sin. His death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death. Which is why you and I are now freed from sin. Now we belong to God!

Therefore, Paul’s question is: why do we want to go back to our old workplace? It’s time to show up in the new one!

The new life we have in Christ is believing each day we are made right with God through Jesus. Jesus has made us righteous before God by what He has done. There is nothing we can do – nothing – to become righteous before God. Only Christ *can do that* and Christ has made us right before God.

The new life we have in Christ is to rise each day moving forward in our new jobs as beloved sons and daughters living – not towards sin, but living for God. Our destination isn’t the old ways of life, but loving God and loving neighbor through all we say and do.

Our new life is believing in grace, learning forgiveness, tasting mercy in bread and wine, advocating for justice, giving a cup of cold water. If we keep looking backwards, our old life of sin has nothing to offer but darkness, death and destruction. This new life is full of promise, hope and love as we fear, love and trust God above all things.

So how do we show up? Consider how a spouse shows up for his or her partner. Each day they commit to loving this one person. With God’s help, they do everything possible to make their loved one’s life better. Their spouses’ joy is their joy. Their spouses’ heartbreak is their own. They learn forgiveness, patience, encouragement, and deeper love each day.

We show up for God committing to love God. We consciously act in ways to better God’s world. Each day we learn that our old life of doing whatever we want isn’t as fun as obeying and pleasing God. We trust that God alone makes us right. Therefore, with God’s help, we learn to live forward and not look back at all of our mistakes.

Yet most of all, in this new life, we trust that we belong to God. We trust that our identity is rooted in God’s unconditional love for us. We believe that we have

worth in God's eyes. Forgiveness is not some hoped for ideal, but a reality in a living, life-changing relationship with our creator.

Finally, we know the Holy Spirit is always at work, pulling us closer and closer to God. Through this grace filled action, we are made more and more like Christ each day. Oh, belonging to God...it's the most amazing thing ever!

Therefore, let us build, not only a house, but 'a world where words are strong and true, where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness, and as symbol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus...all are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.' (ELW 641.) Amen.

We've probably all know people that can't quit doing something. It might even be ourselves. (But for the sake of a little fun, let's talk about them, instead of us!) They are enslaved to their cell phones...always checking them, always looking at them, that little black thing is attached to the end of their hand like an extra appendage.

Or we know people that can't quit exercising, or smoking, or buying clothes, or fixing their old car, or watching tv, or whatever it is....it seems they are always doing it. When people are truly enslaved to something, they lose power and control over their own selves. In history and modern day, those who enslave others, make certain this is true, controlling when people eat, what they wear, the hours they work, etc. Slaves do not have power and lose all control over any part of their lives. This is like death for them.

For Paul, *'Sin is a power that vies with the Creator for control of creation to such an extent that Paul can speak of humanity's having been "enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6).*

The first commandment is: You shall have no other gods. Martin Luther explained it like this: We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things. This is the first commandment, because our human nature, of course, is to return to those other gods, which is idolatry, and become enslaved to them instead of God.

To preach this text is to proclaim hearers' new identity and destination in Christ, and to invite them to show up in the new workplace rather than return to the old one.