

This Sunday's texts:

[Jeremiah 20:7-13](#)

[Romans 6:12-23](#)

[Matthew 10:5a, 21-33](#)

Allegiance Claimed

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The Holy Gospel for this day comes to us from the Gospel of Matthew, the 10th chapter:

⁵These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: ... ²¹“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. ²²You will be hated by everyone because of Me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved. ²³When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. Truly I tell you, you will not finish going through the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴The student is not above the teacher, nor the servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household? ²⁶So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear; proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them falls to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. ³²Whoever acknowledges Me before others, I will acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³But whoever disowns Me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, allow our hearts and souls to hear the Good News of Your Gospel this day, to claim us as your own. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Some tough texts in our readings today. Old Testament lesson, Gospel lesson say life has hardship. Life has struggles. Life has opponents to God and those who would seek to follow God. In that context, I felt Romans speak powerfully this week. So I want to call us to listen to the truth of the Gospel that we hear in Romans and allow that to interpret for us Old Testament and gospel this day. We are on a series through Romans and we're seeking in that series to understand how the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church shapes

the message of the Gospel that we hear from Paul to the Romans. So we look at that today.

In fact, you might want to do what she's doing right here and that is open your Bibles to Romans. You have pew Bibles in front of you and you're welcome to turn to Romans for that. I would encourage you to do so. If you're considering that, it again is on page 1607 in your pew Bible.

If you look at that text, one of the things you're going to see is that that text begins with this word "*Therefore*, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its evil desires."¹ I've said this a thousand times if I've said it once. When you're reading the Bible and you come to the word "therefore," make sure you know what it's there for. In fact, my insights this week as I journeyed through that Romans text and as I heard that Romans text speaks to the Old Testament and the Gospel lesson, one of the primary ideas came from "therefore." We cannot read the rest of our reading this morning and understand what it means unless we understand the "therefore." "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires." What's it there for? Well, if you look at what's ahead of it, you discover these words. "If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."² Everything that's about to be said in Romans is said in the context of you have already died to sin in Christ. You have already been redeemed in Christ.

So read the rest of this knowing who you are, knowing whose you are. Since you've already died to sin, therefore, don't let sin reign in your mortal bodies. It's already done and so now live in the truth of what has been done. Remember as you think about sin in your life that it's been paid in full. Or as Pastor Joe said last week in his conversation in the story he told, your sin is remembered no more. God says I can't remember.

Well, wait a minute, Joe. Hang on a second here, buddy. If God can do anything, then how can you say God can't remember? Because God chose to wipe that sin away. It's not that God is unable to remember. It's that God is able to wipe it away, so that it is not remembered.

We need to grasp the full truth of the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. I say that strongly and firmly because of my own struggle to grasp the truth. It's so easy for me to remember my sin and brokenness, and so much harder to remember

¹ Romans 6:12

² Romans 6:5-6

day in and day out that I have been forgiven by God and given a new identity in Christ.

One of the powerful notions that came in this text in Romans was this. “For sin shall no longer be your master.”³ Well, how is that? Well, because it's been paid off. It's lost its claim. It's been dethroned. Sin no longer owns you. You're no longer indebted to it because you have been forgiven, because, the text says, “you are not under the law, but under Grace.”⁴ I love this picture. Grace covers you. Grace protects you from the accusation, from the deceit, from the storms that sin wage in our world and in our lives, and in our very souls. We are under Grace.

Then the text moves on and it says, “What then?? What then and then it's this famous verse of “Shall we continue to sin that Grace may abound? By no means!”⁵ But I want to ask the other question. I want to ask the question that was suggested, but then forgotten because we move on. What then? Maybe I should put it differently. Maybe I should say “Now what?” Now that we're under Grace, now that we've died to sin, now what? How might we live? Do I go back to that which enslaved me? No way! Not going to do it.

But how can I possibly live under Grace? I live under Grace because I live under its protection. I live under Grace because I live under its lordship. I live under Grace because I live according to the promise. The God who brought me this Grace, the God who brings this Grace afresh each and every day, in each and every moment, the God who covers us with His Grace is the God who is with us, the God whom we walk with in each and every moment, in those moments of doubt, in those moments of temptation, in those moments of struggle, in those moments of those who would even stand against us that are spoken about in Peter. It is spoken about in the New Testament today. It's spoken about in the Gospel today. There are those when you follow Jesus will stand against you, but it's okay. The Lord of Grace under which you live protects you, guides you, blesses you.

That is the reality we want to look at. Listen again to this text from Romans. “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.”⁶ Pay attention to the tense. You are those who *have been brought* from death to life.

³ Romans 6:14

⁴ Romans 6:14

⁵ Romans 6:1 (ESV)

⁶ Romans 6:13

That is your current reality. Now there's an element of "not yet"-ness there. There's an element of the fullness of Grace and goodness and perfection that is a part of the promise of God that we are being brought in, drawn into. But today, as you sit here and worship, as you sit here following your confession, following that absolution, you live under Grace. Don't forget that's who you are because of what has been done for you, because the God you worship has brought you from death to life, embraced, empowered by God's love and presence in our lives, by His promise, according to His faithfulness.

There's a word from Mother Teresa that I came across this week. It says this. "Give yourselves fully to God. He will use you to accomplish great things on the condition that you believe much more in His love than in your own weakness." That's essentially the sermon today. Will you believe more in your brokenness and sin or will you believe more in the power of God's love and forgiveness, that led Jesus to give His life for you? Believe more in the promise of God than in your own brokenness.

There's a relatively famous story. The way I heard it it was entitled "The One You Feed." Once there lived a small boy who loved to listen to stories. His grandmother was an expert in telling stories and she used to tell this one story before sleep. "My dear," she said, "you're a grandson. I'm going to tell you a war story. Little boys especially love war stories. It is the war that goes on in every individual. It is a war between two wolves inside us. One is evil. It consists of anger, envy, jealousy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, false pride, superiority, and ego. The second one is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith." The grandson thought about it and then he asked, "Grandma, which one wins?" and Grandma said, "The one you feed." You know that story. You've heard that story before. That's not a new story. I knew when I told it that you likely would have heard it before. I think that sometimes we believe that story is our truth. We recognize the cognitive dissonance, the conflict in our own hearts and in our own lives, the pull between sin and righteousness. We want to believe that we're in control. If we feed one and not the other, then it will win in our lives. We often would perceive that as a tug of war in my soul. Is that your reality? As you live and seek to live out your faith and do what God would want you to do, live your life in the character and values of God rather than the characters of this world, or what selfishness and temptation might call you to you, do you perceive a tug of war within you? I want to suggest to you today that the Gospel says something entirely different.

I want to suggest to you that that sense of a tug of war in your soul is rooted in deception. It's not the truth. I know sin is real, but so is forgiveness. I know I'm broken, but I'm also healed. I know I'm weak, but the God who claims and walks with me is almighty, strong, in fact, the strongest.

When I got up early this morning and was looking over my sermon notes, I just wanted to send a note to my son. I got a message that he had exercised this morning. You know he's an hour earlier, but I still think he was up early. He's often on the worship team at his church. I just wrote him. I said, "Make it a great day. God is good!" He wrote back to me "Indeed!" and then he sent me a song. Maybe he's singing it today. I don't know. It's possible. I looked at that song and it's called "Sing Hallelujah." Listen to some of its lyrics. "Sing halle-, sing hallelujah I get to sing it forever. Louder, I sing hallelujah, hallelujah. ... Your goodness has been, Your goodness will be, Your goodness has never depended on me. Hallelujah in the highest, You are good."⁷

Do not be deceived. Do not think that your sin, your brokenness has more power than the promise of the Living God. Do not walk in the guilt of your sin, as if you have to live under it because, brothers and sisters in Christ, we live under Grace. God's faithfulness has claimed us by grace. That's the allegiance we live under. Listen to verse 17. "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching [listen to these words] that has now claimed your allegiance."

I used to think like Peter, that I *gave* my allegiance, that is I used to think like Peter that I could *choose* to be faithful to God. But here I recognize a new word, a new gospel, the "therefore." Having died to sin, having been united with Christ in His death and resurrection, His grace has claimed me. I now live under that Grace. That Grace changes everything. It changes your identity. You're not in a tug of war. God has chosen you. Your identity is not based on the past, except if the past is Jesus dying for you. Which is true? Your experience or the promise of the Living God who has chosen and claimed you as His own. We have been claimed by Grace and live under it. That Grace changes everything. So what we now have is this amazing privilege to live a lifestyle of Grace, to live under the authority of Grace's claim on us, given by God, promised by God, made real by God, the God who provides Grace, forgiveness, strength, purpose, the God who provides our forever. So brothers and sisters in Christ, the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

⁷ "Sing Hallelujah," Naomi Raine. Cover the Earth. 2023.