

Romans 8:1-10  
ILCW A—Lent 4  
March 22, 2020 at Peace, Wautoma

This morning we ponder the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans, chapter 8, the first 10 verses. Let us pray. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It is easy to feel like a prisoner right now. The isolation, fear, sickness and death all around us are friends of our old evil foe, the devil. But we need not be troubled by such things. Jesus says, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.”** Even when it seems our human freedoms are more limited than perhaps ever in our lifetimes, in a time when “normal” is an unknown, rely on what will never change: the truth of salvation from sin, death and hell by our Lord Jesus Christ. And remember how that affects our Christian lives. **Be freed by Christ and for Spirit-filled service!**

**Be freed by Christ!** By nature, we are dead in sin. We are selfish. We strive to care for our pleasures and treasures first. In times of crisis, we worry about our money and our stock of “daily bread” first. We are self-absorbed by the news or by social media. We run constantly, not resting our bodies or souls enough. We were slaves to a sinful way of life in a sinful world destined for eternal death in hell. **“For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”**

Sin and death rule all around us, even in the days when life is normal. Sin wants us to worry. Sin wants us to be afraid. Sin wants us to be selfish. Sin wants us to be isolated. Sin thrives on loneliness and fear. Sin leads us to look at the world around us and our own hearts in despair. Sin makes us impatient. Sin makes us cranky with spending so much time cooped up with our families. The threat of death seems much more real than usual.

But God sent his Son to bring us the victory over sin, death and hell. **“Indeed, what the law was unable to do, because it was weakened by the flesh, God did, when he sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin. God condemned sin in his flesh.”** Take in that last statement for a moment. The law cannot save us from our sins, the world, Satan, death or hell. The law, with its, “Do the will of God! Don’t sin! You deserve punishment for your sins!” cannot save. No one can do anything good, not even pray, without a heart of faith in Jesus. An unbeliever who feeds his neighbors for the duration of the isolation period has done nothing good if he hasn’t done it from a heart believing in Jesus as our Savior.

But God changed all of that for us. He sent his Son in flesh and blood, fully man, yet remaining fully God, into our world to take our sin upon himself. On the cross, God did the unthinkable. He condemned his holy Son to die for your sins and mine. Because innocent Jesus suffered and died for you and me, our sins are totally forgiven. The law has been kept perfectly for us by Jesus. Because of Jesus bodily rising from the grave, we will live in heaven one day.

In Christ, we are righteous, restored to perfect spiritual health. "So then, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We are free from the curse of sin. Before God, we are innocent. We are declared not guilty. We are headed to heaven! In Christ Jesus, we are redeemed, restored and forgiven children of God. Rejoice in it, even in the dark days we live in now!

Be freed by Christ! Be freed in Christ! With Jesus, we have freedom from fear. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from guilt. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from shame. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from sin. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from doubt and worry. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from sickness. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from Satan. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from loneliness and isolation. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from death itself. In Christ Jesus, we have freedom from every enemy of body and souls which could ever try to take us from Jesus. In Christ Jesus, we are free indeed!

We are not simply free for freedom's sake. We are freed for a beautiful purpose. **Be freed for Spirit-filled service!**

Once, hostility and death ruled our minds and hearts. "To be sure, those who are in harmony with the sinful flesh think about things the way the sinful flesh does. For the mind-set of the sinful flesh is hostile to God, since it does not submit to God's law, and in fact, it cannot. Those who are in the sinful flesh cannot please God." The sinful flesh hordes supplies. The sinful flesh delights in the secrecy of isolation to indulge sinful desires. The sinful flesh fights against the call of God to repent and draw near to him for strength and the comfort of his Word and sacraments in these troubled times.

The Holy Spirit has freed us from all of that by leading us to place our trust for every spiritual need in Christ Jesus alone. "But you are not in the sinful flesh but in the spirit, if indeed God's Spirit lives in you. And if someone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to Christ." By means of Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit has poured into our hearts the gift of faith in Jesus as our Savior. We are converted to be children of God. We die to sin with Christ and now live each day in the resurrected life of Jesus our Savior.

Now we are alive in Christ! "But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but your spirit is alive because of righteousness." We live not for sin any more, but for serving our neighbor by serving our Savior Jesus. And right now in this pandemic, we have many friends and neighbors who have in the past been unreceptive or even opposed to the message of Christ crucified and risen whose hearts are even now prepared by the crisis for a hearing of the gospel. Let us embrace those opportunities! Give them a devotion book. Bring them groceries. Check on them daily. Pray for them boldly. Encourage them to worship with us when we are once again able to gather in God's house. Invite them to be baptized and instructed in God's Word. Let your light of faith shine through your good deeds, that many may praise our God and Savior Jesus Christ!

In the world such as it is today, let us live in our faith in Jesus. And let us live for Christ, not just for us or in us, but through us in acts of Christian love for our neighbor in this unprecedented time of need, not just for physical care, but spiritual as well. Be freed by Christ for Spirit-filled service, and watch what Jesus can do in these perilous days. Amen.

Now to him, who is able, according to the power that is at work within us, to do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.”