

Worship

July 30, 2023

10:00 a.m.

St. Andrew's, Mooretown

Call to worship:

Opening prayers (adoration, supplication):

God of the past, present and future,
we marvel at the wonder of your creation.
We praise you for gardens growing, birds singing, stars twinkling,
for shouts of playful joy and restful evening sunsets.
Such delights around us remind us of your goodness.
God with us, day by day,
you also surprise us with moments we will treasure for ever,
and with confidence that turns small beginnings
into projects that make a huge difference.
You promise us a life beyond anything we can imagine,
a kingdom marked by grace, love and justice for all.
In Jesus' name,
by the power of the Spirit breathing within us,
we praise you for your loving kindness,
and the hope it brings to us day by day.
We will live to serve you,
and offer you our love and loyalty now and always.

Confession (unison)

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have
sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.**

**Thinking ourselves wise,
we have not honoured you as God,
we have resisted believing in you,
we have refused to obey your Word,
we have failed to trust your gospel.**

**Forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways.
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

Assurance of God's grace and mercy: Romans 8:1

Hymn: #747 “There is a balm in Gilead”
There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole.
There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul.

**Sometimes I feel discouraged,
and think my work’s in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again.**

There is a balm ...

**Don’t ever feel discouraged,
for Jesus is your friend,
who, if you ask for knowledge,
will never fail to lend.**

There is a balm ...

**If you cannot preach like Peter,
if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus,
who died to save us all.**

There is a balm ...

Scripture: Romans 6:1-23; 7:15-25

Sermon:

The paradox of the new life

Paul's letter to the Romans is a letter of key theological concepts which, when taken all together, comprise the gospel of Jesus Christ which is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.

For the last couple of sermons, we've been thinking about *justification*. We've learned how through Christ's sacrifice of *atonement* (sometimes called *propitiation*), God shows His mercy to the sinner who believes. It is a vicarious act taken on by Christ in which he shed his blood so that we wouldn't have to. By Christ's sacrifice, the almighty and righteous Judge, declares us to be forgiven of sin, innocent and thus able to stand in His holy presence. In other words: through Christ's sacrifice of atonement, God declares us to be *justified* when we accept His grace in faith.

This is the doctrine of *justification*.

Sometimes this is where the presentation of the gospel ends. However, if we stop here, we'll get an incomplete sense of God's great story of salvation.

If God's grace is solely about God forgiving our misdeeds, we might as well continue sinning so that grace may abound! The more we sin, the more God will forgive, and the greater will be the display of God's grace!

This is the backdrop to the apostle Paul's opening rhetorical question in Romans 6:

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?

Perhaps you've heard the argument before: Because God is all about forgiveness, I can keep on doing what I'm doing and just ask for Christ's forgiveness before I die, then he'll forgive all my actions and I'll still get into heaven.

And there's a related argument that is not even too concerned with eternity, but that says, since we are under grace; since God is infinitely merciful and forgives all who turn to Him with a contrite heart, then we can continue living as we want in the knowledge that whatever we do, God forgives!

I once sailed with someone who firmly believed this. Because we are justified by faith, God forgives our actions and so it doesn't matter too much about what we do in our daily living. He lived in a way that satisfied his desires and baser instincts. He was frequently seen in the company of various escorts and, when questioned,

responded with deep conviction, that because we are under grace, we are not beholden to the Covenantal Laws and morality and God forgives.

Forgiveness is central to God's acts of grace, but grace is also about God not only forgiving our sin, but also liberating us from the *power* of sin, death, and the devil. Remember that power is the ability to do work, so the *power* of sin, death, and the devil; or the *dominion* of the same – which is the word Paul used, is the ability of these forces to influence our emotions, reactions, thoughts, and action. In what we just read, Paul argued that because of Christ's sacrificial death, and because we are united with him in our baptism, sin no longer has a right to influence our living. God's grace forgives *and* liberates us from the power of sin so *that* we can live holy and righteous lives now in fellowship with the Triune God for His glory and our good.

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.... [instead we live with God in Christ Jesus]

When Christ was crucified on the cross, our burdens of sin were crucified with him. And we are adopted into a new life united with Christ as God's beloved children.

Well, that sounds good, reflected Paul, but if it's true, why does it seem like so many of my behaviours are the same as they were before I knew Christ!

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ... For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ... For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive of to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Paul recognized that even though he is forgiven by the blood of Christ, and even though he is united with Christ in his baptism, and even though his heart and mind has been renewed/regenerated by the Holy Spirit within him so that he wants to live accordance with Christ's Way that is the True Life (he has "become obedient from the heart"); although he recognized all of this is true, unlike the gentleman I sailed with, he also recognized that many of his behaviours suggest otherwise. He's been renewed in Christ, yet the old life keeps tagging along!

I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind...

This is the paradox of the New Life we have in Christ.

Sin's dominion is broken, yet its influence persists.

We are united with Christ in our baptism and set free from the power of sin, death, and the devil, yet they still continue to try and exert their influence.

Which brings us to another theological concept that is key to salvation: *sanctification*.

Justification is the declaration which the Almighty and Holy Judge makes because of what Christ has done on the cross, that those who accept His grace in faith are forgiven, innocent, and imbued with the very righteousness of God's own self.

Sanctification, is the process by which the Holy Spirit dwelling within us shapes us to be who God made us to be. In a simple sense, *sanctification* means to become holy.

Sanctification is the process of becoming the reflection of Christ. A process that began when we accepted that Jesus is the Son of God, Lord, and Saviour, and will be completed when Christ returns and we are raised in our glorified and incorruptible state.

I liken sanctification to what I imagine statue carving to be. Somewhere in that block of stone is a beautiful image of a person. But to reveal it, a bunch of waste has to be chipped away. To become who God made us to be, we need to be relieved of all of the burdens piled upon us by the effects of sin.

We are forgiven and set free from sin's dominion. But we are not yet in the resurrection life. And, in this present age, sin still tries to get the upper hand.

Part of our task in the process of being sanctified is to "not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies."

The question then becomes: How do we recognize what is of sin and what is of God?

It's not enough to simply go by what other people think, say, and do; or by what the media or policy makers decree is right. Much of what is considered acceptable in general society, and what might even seem good and loving from the

perspective of our human limitations is not part of God's greater design and may actually turn out to be harmful.

Right now, it seems as though electric vehicles are part of the answer to reversing climate change. Policy makers, car companies, and the media are backing this idea. It seems good and right. After all, looking only at individual cars, they seem much cleaner than internal combustion engines! However, we don't yet know the long-term ramifications. We don't know what will be the effect on the environment and on the welfare of local residents of all the mining that will have to be done, or the power plants that will have to generate the electricity, or the processes of scrapping and recycling the cars and batteries at the end of their lives. I hope my scepticism is unfounded. And the general societal sense says that it is. But we don't yet know. We are the creatures, not the Creator. We don't know the entire score.

So, Paul argued this is part of the purpose of the Law; what we would call the Word of God. Because of sin, humans have a tendency to think ourselves as wise in the knowledge of good and evil. But we have a very limited perspective. So, God, who alone knows the beginning and the end, gave the Law so that we could learn His will, discern what is sin and what is righteousness, and behave accordingly. And, as we strive to learn and live the Word of God, the Holy Spirit within us sanctifies us, shapes us into God's image bearers, and helps us to live faithfully in the paradox of the New Life.

Amen.

Affirmation of faith (The Apostle's Creed)

Receive and bless the offerings

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
praise Him all creatures here below,
praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession with the Lord's Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ,

We offer you our thanks this day

for you are the true source of peace and healing for us
in a world that feels out of joint so often.

Today we pray for those who face choices and decisions about their health:

for those trying to follow good diets and exercise enough;

for any waiting for appointments or wondering if they should make another
call;

for those who find caring for their health frustrating,

and for all feeling pain or anxiety as they wait for healing and peace.....

God, in your mercy,

Guide us in our choices and challenges.

Lord Jesus Christ:

We offer you our thanks this day

for you are the true source of wisdom and generosity
in a world struggling to make ends meet.

Today we pray for all who face choices and decisions about their finances:

for those struggling with bills and budgets;

for those torn between covering necessities and enjoying a treat;

for all who have few choices because resources are limited,

and for those who have many choices and want to make them wisely.

God, in your mercy,

Guide us in our choices and challenges.

Lord Jesus Christ:

We offer you our thanks this day

for you are the true source of love and forgiveness
in a world full of criticism and self-doubt.

Today we pray for those facing choices and decisions about relationships:

for people we ought to call but just haven't;

for those with whom we feel a grievance but haven't worked it through;

for those we'd like to invite into closer relationship but haven't yet found the
courage;

and for those we miss dearly and need to tell how much we cherish them.

God, in your mercy,

Guide us in our choices and challenges.

Lord Jesus Christ:

We offer you thanks this day

for you are the source of rest and right relationship for God's whole creation.

Today we pray for the earth and its well-being.

Encourage us to care for the earth in our everyday lives
so its resources last for coming generations.
Inspire us to live out our good intentions for the earth in our choices big and
small
so that your kingdom may come on earth not by disaster but through
discipleship.
For it is as your disciples we pray:
The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: #665 "Lord Jesus, you shall be my song"
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;
I'll tell everybody about you wherever I go:
for our life and our peace and our love is yourself.
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.

Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.
May all of my joy be a faithful reflection of you.
May the earth and the sea and the sky join my song.
Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.

As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant,
to carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.
For you saved me by giving your body and blood.
As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.

I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey;
but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.
And with all of the family you saved by your love,
we'll sing to your dawn at the end of our journey.

Benediction