

God's Greater Story Begins with Slaves

3rd Sun. after Pent. – 06/21/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Romans 6:12-23 – Pastor Keith Besel
Confirmation Sunday

[Paul begins in v.17,] “...thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin...”
[then concludes in v.22,] “...now...have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God...”.

Introduction

- ⌘ Lord, “*Take myself, and I will be, ever only all for Thee!*” (LSB, #783) Did you mean those words that you sang just a moment ago?
 - ➔ Do you really want the Lord to take your entire life and make it His?
- ⌘ Today is not only our first Sunday worshiping back here in the Lord's sanctuary, it is Confirmation Sunday as well for Wyatt Herring.
- ⌘ For those of us that have been confirmed already, that is precisely what we said we wanted when we made our vows before God however many years ago it was.
 - ➔ Two of those vows ask, “*Do you intend to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?*”
 - ➔ And the second, “*Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death rather than fall away from it?*” (LSB, Confirmation Rite, pg. 273)
 - ➔ Wyatt and I have talked about those two vows in particular; about the permanence and severity and serious consequences involved in those questions. We talked as well about how so many people who have answered “yes” to those question have now turned away from God and have willingly returned back to become slaves of sin once again.
- ⌘ The response that we find in the Confirmation ceremony to those questions is this: “**I do, by the grace of God**”.
 - ➔ “By the grace of God” — that's the most important part of all isn't it? Because none of us – not one of us can do any of what these Confirmation vows or what Paul is talking about in our text today require of us by ourselves. [Wyatt, you can't make any of the vows or commitments that you make today without the grace of God.]
- ⌘ Today we continue our Sermon series through the summer and fall readings in Paul's letter to the Romans which we began last Sunday, called “God's Greater Story”.
 - ➔ And it fits perfectly with the confirmation of Wyatt that we [will] witness here today [in our 10:30 service].
- ⌘ The Bible verse that Wyatt chose as his Confirmation verse, Genesis 1:24, tells not only Wyatt, but all of us that we are part of a bigger story than just what we experience and see here today.
 - ➔ It takes us back to the sixth day of Creation where “God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds – livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.’ And it was so.”
 - ➔ You see it was out of nothingness, as Genesis 1:2 describes the earth as being “without form and void”, that God created us to be in an image-bearing relationship with Him. Yet we all know that a lot has happened from that day, some 6 to 8 thousand years ago, until today. Still all of it

is our story; technically it is “*God’s Greater Story*” of which He has graciously chosen to include you and me today by His grace!

I. In baptism, God brings us into an on-going story

- ✘ And today, in chapter six of Paul’s letter, we’re told that it is only by the grace of God; that is by His undeserved love poured over us in His gift of baptism that we are joined to the power of Christ’s death and resurrection and infused into God’s greater story; making us God’s greater people and a part of God’s greater plan individually and as His Church.
 - ➔ You see, God’s work doesn’t start with you. No, you have been brought into God’s family. What God did at the first creation, He continues to do in a new way for each and every generation, including ours today.
- ✘ Paul tells the Christians in Rome, and you and me today, that we are now a changed people. What we are today is not the same as what we were before our baptism.
 - ➔ Before our text, in verse six, Paul refers to our earlier reality as “slaves of sin” (v.17). He says that in baptism, “We know that our old self was crucified with [Jesus] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6).
- ✘ Slaves to sin – that’s where your part [Wyatt] and mine began in God’s story. And caught in that slavery from birth, we were powerless to do anything but live and breathe; think and speak and act according to our own self-centered wants and desires.
 - ➔ Even now that Christ has freed us from that slavery by His saving work we still fight the urge to go back to that “old” way of life and let Satan slap the irons back upon us again. Yes friends, you’re not being honest if you don’t see the temptations around you every day; how you are enticed by the sights and sounds and tastes and smells tugging at you from your friends, co-workers, social media and even your family to fall back into sinful slavery; the slavery of things like using improper and hurtful words against each other; or holding grudges and refusing to forgive; or repeating judgmental accusations about others without even checking to see what the facts really say; or just plain giving in to the urges of your sinful flesh rather than calling on the name of Christ to help and keep you faithful to being the new person He has made you to be.
- ✘ It happens to so many people. Sadly it is especially common soon after young folks are confirmed. An LCMS blog reported two years ago that only around 30% of those confirmed in an LCMS church are still attending church 10 years after they are confirmed (<https://blogs.lcms.org/2018/relationships-not-programs-youth-ministry-shares-research-young-adults/>).
 - ➔ And surprisingly that figure has been consistent for the last number of generations.
 - ➔ Here at Mt. Calvary, I looked at our last 10 years of confirmation classes and we’re in the same ballpark. We’ve confirmed 16 students and have only 6 that are still connected to the church – that’s 37.5%.
- ✘ Paul shows us that this struggle though; this story of which we are a part is nothing new. That’s why he repeats himself over and again, reminding us who we were – “slaves of sin” and “impurity” (vv. 17 & 19) and then telling us who God has made us to be – “slaves of God” and His “righteousness” (vv. 22 & 19).

II. In baptism, we are dead to sin and alive to God

- ✘ This transformation; this re-creation within us, Paul tells us just before our text, took place in the waters of baptism where our old self was buried into the death and resurrection of Christ. Yes,

connected in baptism to Christ's saving work, Paul says in verse 11, "you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus".

→ "Dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" – that's what you are. That's God's promise to you and me, dear Christians. But is that how you feel? Is that what your life looks like each day? That you are dead to sin?

→ I know the mirror of God's Law does its job well, doesn't it? – showing us our shortcomings and sins right now, sometimes to the point that we dwell on them; that we get depressed and we feel like all is lost.

✘ Yet, this morning Paul asks you and me to look not only at the true reflection of our struggle with sin, but also to take a long look into the reflective pool of baptism and see our reality now in Christ. "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11).

→ Don't forget that promise; that truth; that miraculous work performed inside of you folks [Wyatt and the rest of you] as you go out into the world and face all that it has to throw at you.

→ This promise isn't my promise to you but God's promise to you! This is the same God who created all things; the God who rose from the dead; the God who now reigns in the glory and wonder of heaven; the God who sends His Spirit among His people; the God who frees; the God who lives; and the God who brings about in you a marvelous new creation!

→ You can count on this promise folks. Don't turn away from it; don't doubt it.

III. Present yourselves to God as His willing slave.

✘ Instead as Paul says in verse 13, "...present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness".

→ From beginning to end that sentence says nothing about your work or your accomplishment. No, it speaks all about God's transforming work re-creating, guiding and empowering you and me to be what God calls us to be in His far *Greater Story*.

✘ In verse 22 Paul says something that actually sounds contradictory on the surface. He says, "Now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God!" Well, how can I be set free to become a slave?

✘ Maybe a couple examples will help. G. Campbell Morgan was once approached by a soldier who said he would give anything to believe that God could forgive sins, "But I cannot believe He will forgive me if I just turn to Him," He said, "It's too cheap."

→ Dr. Morgan said to him: "Well, you were working in the mine today. How did you get out of the pit? The man answered, "The way I usually do; I got into the cage and was pulled to the top." "How much did you pay to come out of the pit?" "I didn't pay anything." "Well weren't you afraid to trust yourself to that cage? Was it not too cheap?"

→ The man replied, "Oh, no! It was cheap for me, but it cost the company a lot of money to sink that shaft."

→ Suddenly the man saw and realized that it was the infinite price paid by the Son of God for our salvation; the price paid to our account in His grace and not by anything that we've done that grants us forgiveness.

→ That cage was confining wasn't it? Isn't that a form of slavery? Yes, but it was a "slavery" which the man happily received because he knew that the confining nature of it was meant for his protection, care and ultimate freedom from the mine's dark depths.

- ⊗ Think also about a life jacket that is worn on a boat or in the water. It also constrains a person's movement. It limits what that person can do. Yet it holds the power to keep even a man of great weight afloat to save him if he ends up in the deepest of waters.
 - ➔ Folks [and Wyatt], when you made/make the vows in confirmation "*to live according to the Word of God, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to God...*" and "*to continue steadfast in this confession and Church*" you willingly; joyfully surrender to God and His far superior intention and plan for you and your future.
- ⊗ You recognize that it really is a no brainer of a deal. For as Paul says in verses 20-22, to be "slaves of sin" has only one ending – "death" while living in the freedom of Christ – also known as being a "slave of God" has the "end" that is really no end at all – "eternal life".
 - ➔ As if things couldn't get any better, on top of that, when we commit our lives completely to Christ, as Wyatt will [is about to] do today, then our future in the Lord's service is bound by words like this from Jesus Himself, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).
 - ➔ Yes that means that when you look to your life in Christ, nothing is impossible with God!

Conclusion

- ⊗ [Remember those words Wyatt.] Remember these promises from God, dear Christians. And confess boldly and joyfully that you are dead to sin and alive to Christ; knowing that your part in *God's Greater Story* begins with you as a "slave of sin" (v.17), but it ends gloriously with you being a "slave of God" by His grace. Amen.