

Liberated Through Christ

Sunday School Lesson

Romans 6:1-14

November 10, 2024

We all know the liberation story of Exodus. While Jacob's son, Joseph, was the one who correctly interpreted Pharaoh's dream and prepared the country to survive a significant drought, Joseph's family and brothers became the unknowing patriarchs of the oppressed slaves of Egypt. The birthrate of the Hebrews was higher than that of the Egyptians and soon, this minority in Egypt became the source of fearmongering which led to their enslavement. It is estimated that the Hebrews lived in Egypt over four hundred years and while we might not have the exact date of their enslavement, we can imagine the living conditions were harsh.

Now remember, the Sabbath had not been established yet so they worked seven days a week. They worshiped the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and they begged for relief from their harsh conditions. God was listening. He raised up someone with the skills to lead the people out of slavery only Moses did not know it yet. God would liberate God's people and send them into the land promised to Abraham. Unfortunately, this would not be an easy task. Moses was a quick learner but God's own people were not. This is a defining story for Israel just as Washington crossing the Delaware River or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address are defining stories for Americans.

In the sixth Chapter of Romans, Paul uses this Hebrew liberation story as a way to understand the grace received from Jesus Christ. It is this grace that releases us from the bondage of sin. Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone. This means our salvation is a gift. But grace is always transformative. And that is the important truth in our lesson today.

Let us pray

O Holy God and Creator of the Universe, thank you for being present with us this week. Open our hearts to hear your word so we may be faithful disciples who are known by our love for one another and for our love of our neighbors. Amen.

Our Purpose Statement: **To claim and experience Christ's gift of liberation.**

"Sin" is a word that we do not like to use. We also do not care for the words "iniquity" or "transgression." Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book entitled *Speaking of Sin*, claims that this is a result of the fiery sermons many of us heard laced with blame and threat when we were younger. We feel judged and that makes us uncomfortable. Some churches have removed a prayer of confession from their liturgy because it makes people feel badly. We love to speak of grace but we do not like to refer to sin, especially our own sins.

Sin is what makes grace so powerful which is what Paul begins Chapter Six with the question "Should we continue sinning so grace will multiply? Absolutely not!" Sin does

more than alienate us from God – sin also alienates us from one another. We are supposed to be encouraging one another, lifting each other up, and praying for one another. Sin destroys relationships. In our lesson, the author tells the story of a young woman whose sin had so offended her mother that her mother sinned by telling her daughter that she could never be forgiven. Her mother died shortly thereafter, making their estrangement permanent. Such stories are more common than you think. No, we do not need sin in order for grace to multiply!

Next Thursday, I will head to Newport, Arkansas to spend time in McPherson Correctional Facility for Women as part of a Kairos Ministry Team. Kairos is built on the Walk to Emmaus model but designed especially for prison ministry. Those of us in the pew can dress up on Sundays and act as if we have never sinned but not these ladies. Most of the women in McPherson on some drug related charges, including robbery, assault and even murder. This is my second time to serve as clergy on a team and on the first day, we will meet many women who feel that they have sinned beyond redemption. Over the course of our four days together, we will witness the amazing power of the Holy Spirit as women prisoners hear the good news of Jesus Christ in a way that relieves them of shame and brings them to the hope of God's love.

This is what Paul is telling us in Romans. We do not have to live as prisoners to sin, guilt, or shame any longer. We have been liberated not because of anything we have done but what God has done through Jesus Christ. Our freedom from sin is a gift but to release its power, we must accept the gift. Once you do accept that gift, it challenges you to follow Jesus and learn to live in grace and hope rather than sin and despair.

So can you imagine being sentenced to life in prison without parole? Can you imagine living behind bars for the remainder of your life with the guilt and anger that got you there in the first place. Can you imagine thinking "Is this all there is?" for the remainder of your life? Then one day, you encounter the living Christ. You may have grown up in church. You may have heard the gospel but somehow, you did not think you really needed it. Now, it is like you are hearing it for the first time and suddenly, grace fills all those empty places in your heart. You are released. Then you realize you have not been forgotten. God still has work for you to do.

Members of the team that live closer to Newport return to the prison every month for Prayer & Share. They get to watch what happens to these women a month, six months, or years later. When Kairos goes into McPherson, they are often helped by prisoners whose lives were changed years before. It really is amazing grace.

How has the grace of God reshaped your life?

When has it provided you with the hope you needed?

If you are still dealing with guilt, use this lesson and Scripture to let it go today.

O Holy God, transform our lives as we follow you. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and most of all, hearts that do not judge. Amen.