

"Slaves or Children"  
Romans 7:14-25a

July 10, 2011

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost

When my children were growing up and I asked them to do something, they would sometimes answer in disgust, "You treat us like slaves!" I'm pretty sure that they didn't have a clear idea of what slavery is. They probably said that just for the shock value. (However, it never shocked me nor did it get them out of doing whatever I asked them.)

Maybe your children said the same thing about you. Maybe they felt that way about their teacher when she gave them homework. Maybe you've felt that way in your heart about your boss when the workload was heavy. Do you ever feel that way about God – that you are a slave? Have you ever stopped to consider what makes these things seem like slavery?

What is slavery anyway? I think there are four aspects of slavery which we sometimes apply to these situations. First, slavery involves ownership of another individual. Sometimes children feel that their parents or their teachers "own" them. You may feel the same about your boss.

Secondly, slavery involves certain mandatory behavior. The slave has no choice but to obey. Children have no choice but to obey their parents or their teachers. You have no choice but to obey your boss.

Thirdly, slavery involves sure and certain consequences for noncompliance. There is always the threat of punishment for wrong behavior which will be carried out if the behavior has not changed. Parents punish misbehaving children. Teachers give failing grades to students who don't do the work. Bosses fire employees who don't measure up.

Fourthly, slavery often produces dislike, even hatred, for the master who is perceived to be cruel. Children are angry at parents and my yell out, "I hate you!" Students say despise difficult teachers. Workers hate bosses.

Are we slaves? I think it's a bit over exaggerated to refer to any of these every day life situations as "slavery". However, there is no doubt that all of us were, in fact, slaves. Jesus says,

““Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” (John 8:34) Since Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, each of us is born under the ownership of sin. “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5) We are owned by sin and its originator, Satan.

Certain behavior was required of us by our Creator. This was not optional. Yet, we didn’t do it. In fact, we often did what was forbidden. Sin controlled us.

The Law of God threatens certain punishment for sin. For not doing the behavior required of us by our Creator, we will die – both physically and eternally. The reality of this is seen, not only in the clear testimony of Scripture (“The wages of sin is death,” (Rom. 6:23)), but also in our own experience. People die and nothing stops that.

We despise our situation and live in fear because of it. The writer to the Hebrews says, “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.” (Heb. 2:14-15) We end up disliking God for demanding certain behavior from us and we hate the devil who holds the power of death and we are enslaved by our fear of death.

The Good News is that we have been liberated through Jesus Christ. He took all of our sin upon Himself on the cross and endured its punishment so that your sin would be forgiven. Now, we are out of slavery. We are free from sin’s ownership. In Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit establishes residency in our hearts and ownership of our souls.

We are free from the threats and condemnations of the Law. Jesus perfectly fulfilled all the demands of the Law and shares with us His own righteousness and holiness.

We are freed from the fear of death. By Christ’s resurrection from the dead, the devil’s control over death is broken. It no longer has power over us.

So what does this all mean? It does not mean, as I said last week, that we are free to do whatever we want and that God doesn’t require obedience from us because of His grace given to us.

The Bible says, “do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh.” (Gal 5:13). Yet I see so many professing Christians who, by their choices and priorities, disregarding this. There seems to be no effort by Christians to turn away from the sins and priorities of the culture, but only to blend in with them and follow them. There seems no obligation felt by Christians to live lives of holy obedience, but to use the grace of God as an excuse for sin.

Paul, in our text for today, says, “So then, brothers, we are debtors.” A debtor is someone who owes. What do we owe and to whom do we owe it? We owe obedience to God. It is not optional. “We owe it to our Creator and our Deliverer to live the *life* which he has given us.” (Franzmann, p.145). In fact, Paul says, “For if you live according to the flesh (deliberately and purposely sinning), you will die.”

Does this mean then that we have been saved from one type of slavery and given over to a different slavery with God now as a “nice” master under the Gospel as opposed to the “mean” master sin was under the Law? That’s not it either. This is an entirely different situation.

In our baptisms, the Holy Spirit not only brings us to faith in our Savior, Jesus Christ, and makes us clean from all sin, He also changes our status before God. Before, we were slaves to sin. Now, Paul says, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

How could we, sinful by nature and sinners by behavior, ever be sons and daughters of God? We are not born into that family, nor have we earned a place in the family. We have been adopted into the family by the grace of God. This changes everything. A slave is always afraid of what the master might do to punish him. His place in the household was never permanent or secure. He could be sold or killed in a moment’s notice. A slave lived in fear.

A son or daughter never needs to fear. They are not workers for the family. They are members of the family. Their place within the family is always secure by virtue of their birth into that family.

Paul writes, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” Martin Luther said, “Fear does not say Abba but rather it hates and flees from the Father as the enemy and mutters against him as a tyrant.” We need never fear the Lord as a cruel tyrant, feel that He is our enemy, or complain about Him. Instead, we can call Creator of the universe Abba!, our Father. We can know that He loves us and is on our side. We can trust in Him to care for us always.

We need not fear for our place in the household of God. God has paid for the price of our adoption into His family with the blood of His only Son, Jesus Christ. Having paid such a high price for us out of such a great love, He will neither forsake us nor reject us. Our place with Him is safe.

That leads to a whole new attitude for obedience. It no longer an obedience forced out of fear of God’s anger or in an attempt to earn God’s favor or blessing. We no longer fear God’s anger because He is our Father, not our slave driver. We no longer need to earn God’s favor or blessing because we are His children, not His subjects. Obedience to God is now a willful and joyful privilege.

Think of it in terms of your earthly father. As you grown into adulthood, you see how this works. When Dad needs something done, you do it out of love and in appreciation for his love. When Abba needs something done – teaching a VBS class, bringing someone to church, helping someone who needs food or other assistance, you do it out of love and in appreciation for His love.

You find yourself giving gifts to Dad on Father’s Day, on his birthday, and other times. Not because he needs it but because you love him and want to show your appreciation for all the gifts He has given you. You find yourself giving your offerings to Abba joyfully here at church and through other organizations. Abba doesn’t “need” your money, but you want to show your appreciation for all the gifts He has given you.

You go over to Dad’s for dinner, not because you have to, but because you want to. He invites you over and will give you a great dinner which will nourish you and provide family togetherness. When Abba invites you over for His Supper, you go, not because you have to, but because you want

to. He has prepared a feast for your salvation in the body and blood of His Son and you want that. It nourishes your faith and provides family togetherness.

I think you get the point. Freed from slavery to sin, the threat of the Law, and the fear of death and elevated to the status of son or daughter of the living God, you simply live the life He wants you to live out of love for Him and for the benefit of your neighbor. There's no pressure. You are truly free. Just live the life He has given you without worrying about the future.

Your future is secure. God has not only taken care of your past and provided for the present. He has guaranteed your future. If you are a child of God, Paul says, you are also an heir. You are an heir of God. You stand to inherit everything that God has which is everything! You are a fellow heir with your older brother, Jesus Christ. Everything He has is yours. You suffer now, but that's not surprising. You are sharing in His sufferings. But the good news is that you will share in the glory which belongs to the Son of God. We cannot even imagine how astounding and stupendous this will be. His Word promises, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." (1 Cor. 2:9)

A big problem in our society today is identity theft. People have their identities stolen online and lose the money from their bank accounts, their credit standing, and their peace of mind, leaving them impoverished. Do not let the devil or your sinful self steal your identity and leave you spiritually impoverished by convincing you that you are a slave, God is a master, and life is all about doing the right things to get God to like you or bless you. Remember who you are: a child of God. He is your loving Father, your Abba. Life is all about freely and joyfully serving Him as a loving child in response to all He has done for you and given to you until you, as His heir, inherit everything He has. What status we have: children of God, not slaves! What joy we have: serving God, not being enslaved by sin! What hope we have: heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ! It doesn't get any better than that! Amen.

