

VII Trinity 2021  
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish  
Father Craig Looney  
*Romans 6.19-23 St. Mark 8.1-11*



“Listen up”...says our friend Saint Paul.  
“Listen up! You were once slaves who completely surrendered yourselves to wickedness for wicked purposes. Now you must completely surrender yourselves as slaves of righteousness for good and holy purposes.”

Righteousness is one of those words we hear a lot in church. The word *righteousness* comes from the Old English verb *rightwise*...being in a *right* state or condition...as opposed to the Old English verb *wrangrize*...being in a *wrongful* state or condition. Another word for righteous is *justified...squared up* like the margins in a book.

Jesus and Paul use the word righteous to describe being in a correct and upright relationship with God. The Pharisees thought they were upright with God because of who they were and the works they did. We get put upright with God not because of who we are or the works we do...we get put upright with God because of what Jesus has done for us...paid the price we should have paid...and set us free from slavery to sin.

Slavery as an institution existed throughout the ancient world. We don't like talking about it because of our own history. It shows just how cruel human beings can be toward each other. Slaves had no rights. Their time and activity was constantly monitored. They didn't get paid for their work.

Paul uses the imagery of slavery to counter a dangerous false teaching that was spreading throughout the Church. He equates slavery to sin and not just in an allegorical sense. Some people were saying since we receive grace and new life through Christ...sin no longer has any consequences. Our bad actions no longer matter.

We can imagine Paul saying something like, “Seriously!” He might have gone on to say, “Listen up, folks. If that is true, then we are no better off than we were before Jesus came down. We're still slaves to sin, darkness and death.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said the same thing when he wrote,

*“Of course you have sinned, but now everything is forgiven, so you can stay as you are and enjoy the consolations of forgiveness.”*

What Pastor Bonhoeffer is really saying is that sort of attitude is defective and disordered...because it means there was no forgiveness in the first place.

Jesus sets us free from the consequences of sin and death and makes everlasting life in heaven a possibility for everyone who believes in him. He made us *rightwised...justified...squared up* with God.

But while heaven and everlasting life are God's free gifts to us through Jesus...they come with a price, which can be costly. We must embrace the freedom to stay away from dark things that enslave us and instead embrace the complete freedom of following the Light of Christ...to do what is right and good.

Paul tells us we can't buy our way into heaven through our good works because they are extensions of God's grace. But what we do does matter. We want our work to be productive. The work we do, the blessings we receive from God, and the promise of everlasting life are better than any wages or paycheck we get now.

Everlasting life is God's free gift to us. It's not something we earned. Jesus paid a heavy price for our freedom from sin, and he did so willingly. He never put any conditions on us. He never said, “Love me or I won't do this.” He did this because he loves us.

The wonderful part of what Jesus did for us is what Paul tells us...we don't have to wait until we get to heaven to enjoy everlasting life. We can begin enjoying it right now...in this place...this very moment...compelling words from the man whose heart was set free.

“Listen up”...says Paul...“Listen up!”

