

4th Sunday after Pentecost, 2002
Freedom and Slavery

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Freedom. The epistle today mentions freedom. Freedom is a favorite word in our society. So few know what freedom is. The Apostle says, “Being then made **free** from sin, ye became **servants** of righteousness.” Then he says, “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh.” He is speaking of an exalted topic that only can be understood with spiritual knowledge, and the only way to obtain this knowledge is by spiritual struggle. Our weak will, desiring to do works of righteousness, being joined to the Powerful Will, to the Everlasting Will of God to make us capable of doing those things which are righteous.

He’s going to give us a way of thinking, sort-of a mnemonic device that you should take to heart and use because it is a very useful device. He says, “as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, and iniquity unto iniquity, even so **now** yield your members servants unto righteousness, unto holiness.” In other words, just as before you were enslaved to various sins, now consider yourself a **slave** to righteousness. Just as before – or even, God forgive us, even now perhaps – you have been a slave to a particular way of thinking or doing something, think of yourself now as being **required** to do works of righteousness, just as if you had a taskmaster behind you ordering you to do your work.

Now, he is speaking in the manner of men because of our infirmity.

Actually, the only way to understand how the heart is compelled to do righteousness is to compel yourself. Then you will understand how sweet the Lord is, how beautiful His doctrines are, and how there is nothing more perfect, and more holy, and more fulfilling than to follow God’s law.

So he says, “for when ye were servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.” In other words, you didn’t do righteousness, you did sin, and you couldn’t stop yourself. But what Jesus Christ offers us is the power to become holy! Now He offers us that we would become, willingly, His servants. Now, at the end of the age, those who have been good servants He will call friends, no longer servants. But we, in the here and now with all of our sins and all of our forgetfulness and our intransigence, should consider ourselves to be servants – servants of a Benevolent Master, not having a choice whether we should do righteousness or not. Our Lord commands it so we do it.

“What fruit did we have in these things,” the Apostle asks, “wherein ye are now ashamed?” The things that were unrighteous only gave us pleasure for a season, and then we were unhappy. The end of these things **is** death. He is giving us another idea here, something we should call to mind often. He is saying, “The end of these things is death.”

In order to be able to think such a thought, we must be able to look towards the future. We must be able to see our actions not in the moment, but after the moment, perhaps even far after the moment. If we think of how unhappy we will be if we commit a sin, we will not commit many sins.

Think of your unhappiness after you have fallen into something that shames you. Think about your unhappiness about such a thing **before** you sin, and then you **won’t** sin. The end of such things is death. We know this!

We must learn to live for the future, not to live in the here and now, because after all, aren’t we supposed to be setting our eyes upon the heavenly Jerusalem? Isn’t that supposed to be our goal, our purpose: to

become righteous so that we can be in the presence of God and not only not be ashamed, but be happy; to be completely free?

Imagine being completely free. Not freedom as the world defines it, to do what one chooses, choosing things that actually cause enslavement, but to be completely able to be righteous, to not be touched by any sin, to not have any wavering in our heart towards evil.

The Church thinks this is very important because in every service we say, “deliver us from tribulation, wrath, and necessity.” That necessity is enslavement to unrighteousness. People make excuses for their enslavements all the time. “Well, I smoke because it’s a bad habit I picked up and I haven’t been able to break it.” “I’m always so tired, so I oversleep.” “You know, with all of the impure things all about, I just have so much trouble having pure thoughts.” These are all excuses. When you say such things, or even think such things, then you are saying, “I’m a slave to unrighteousness. My master is the evil one.”

How can we say such things? We are slaves to righteousness. Our Master is our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lived the life that He requires us to live. And He made us capable of living such a life. So we must consider ourselves slaves to Him. So when it comes time that there is a temptation for you, you have to say, “I can’t do that, I’m a slave. I don’t deserve to do that. I don’t have any right to do that. My Lord has told me to do the other thing. I’m a slave. I don’t have a right. I only have a right to do righteousness.” If you think in such terms, you will be saved from many, many sins.

Let freedom be that which is in your heart, brothers and sisters, which allows you to always choose correctly, and not to be forced to do that which is unrighteous. That’s the freedom God offers. It’s not the freedom that society offers. Their definition of freedom is that you can indulge in pleasures as you wish. But pleasures have a price. Indeed, even good pleasures have a price. Even the happiness that we will have with God has its price—our Lord paid that price. We’ve been bought with a price. So since we’ve been bought with a price, we’re no longer our own. We’re not owned by the devil, nor do we own ourselves – our Lord is our Master, so we must do as **He** tells us to do. And it just so happens that **everything** He tells us to do – every single thing – is for our welfare, so that we would become completely free.

All of us have things in our life that we wish we could change. Don’t you hate those things? Don’t just despise that you fall into something again and again? You don’t want to, and yet you do? Well, start thinking of yourself as a slave to righteousness, and then act as a slave would act when considering doing something. You have no right to commit that sin. You have no right to become angry at someone, because your Lord said that you cannot do that. You have no right to have a lustful thought, because your Lord said, “He who looks upon a woman to lust after her has committed adultery in his heart.” And adultery is forbidden. You have no right!

You do have a right to do works of righteousness, and your Lord has given you a blanket blessing to do righteousness in whatever you do. You need not ask Him for permission to do righteousness. But He will check with you; He will require of you works of righteousness. But He allows you to choose, so that you can learn what true freedom really is. Freedom is always to make choices for righteousness – that is what freedom is. Freedom is to have no regrets, no unhappiness, to be complete, whole, lacking nothing.

What a wonderful thing freedom is! And what a terrible thing that this word has been hijacked in our society, to mean something it isn’t, to mean slavery and not freedom. You’ve been made free from sin by your baptism. The Lord has bought you with a price, now we’d best act like we’ve been bought with a price. And he says, “being made free from sin” – that is, being made *capable of being free* from sin. We’re capable of it. Don’t let anyone tell you differently, including the evil one in your ear. You’re capable of being free from sin because the Lord made you such. The Lord bought you with a price. And our Lord is a

good trader; He doesn't make foolish purchases. You've been bought with a price, so you're capable of being free from sin. But you must give your will to the Lord, and give your struggles to the Lord, in order to realize this perfect freedom. Being made free from sin and become servants to God, you have your fruit unto holiness, and the end – everlasting life!

So the Apostle teaches us, as it were, two ways of thinking, two mnemonic devices. One is that when you are presented with the possibility of sin or of righteousness, you say “I am a slave to righteousness. I have no right to commit that sin. I've been bought with a price. I've been made free as regarding sin. There is nothing compelling me to sin as long as I beg the Lord to help me.” And the other is that when you are presented with the possibility of sin, you think that the end of such things is death. “And if I endure but for a little while, I will have fruit unto holiness, and eternal life.

Every sin, every decision in your life, every fork in the road, you should be thinking these things. You have no right to sin. The Lord has told you. You don't have a right to do it. He has told you that you must do righteousness. You must follow Him. You must **desire** to be righteous. And He will help you. But you are not a slave any more – not of unrighteousness. So don't think of yourself as such. And if you fall into unrighteousness, then beg the Lord to forgive you, beg Him to strengthen your will, beg Him to bring to your mind your sadness in this moment so that in the next moment you will recall it and you won't fall into sin.

This can only be understood by experience. Experience is the great teacher of the soul. The Lord, bit by bit, as we are capable, gives us enlightenment. But He only enlightens those who are struggling, only those who are trying, only those who know their position. And that is that they are slaves of Him. Now, He is a benevolent Master, and He doesn't require of us anything, but we had best think that we are required! As soon as we turn towards righteousness even a little, He is there to help us. Let us turn to Him all the time, so that He will help us.

We have an example of experience in the Gospel. When I was thinking about the Epistle and the Gospel today, I thought I wanted to talk about both of them. Well, I can't do that exactly, but I want to say something about Cornelius. A Centurion, he was a Roman. He was officially of a pagan religion. He couldn't go into the synagogue. He couldn't say that he was a Jew. But he had Jewish sacred writings, and he read them, and he loved the Jewish nation, and although he was an occupying soldier, the Jews loved him because he loved them. So when Jesus comes into Capernaum, Cornelius meets Him and says, “my servant lies at home sick of the palsy, paralyzed.” And Jesus says, “I'll come and I'll heal him.”

But Cornelius is a man with experience. Cornelius is a man who knows something about righteousness. He knows something about authority. He says, “I'm not worthy that you come under my roof,” partially because he is a pagan, and a Jew is not to go into a pagan's household – it defiles him. “Only speak the word, and my servant shall be healed, for I am a man under authority, and I have soldiers under me. And I say to this soldier, ‘go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘do this,’ and he does it.” And the inference is, “I know how to do what I'm told, too.”

He was a righteous man – so righteous that the Lord said that He had not found so great faith, not in all of Israel. Now that must have made the Pharisees quite angry, don't you think? Pointing to an occupying soldier, the hated enemy, of the army that they hoped the Messiah would annihilate, and have their blood flow in the streets, and say, “This man is more righteous than all of you put together.” Why was he righteous? Why did he have such faith? Because he knew about **obedience**. He expected those under him to be obedient because he was obedient to those over him. So let us know something about obedience, brothers and sisters; let us know something about authority. Let us realize that we are under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Scripture for the 4th Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 6:18-23 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. 19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. 20 For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. 21 What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. 22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Matthew 8:5-13 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, 6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. 7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. 8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. 9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. 10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. 11 And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 13 And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.