

## SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

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“For *freedom* Christ has set us *free*. Stand *fast* therefore, and do not submit *again* to the yoke of *slavery*.”

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Luke shows us what Jesus is all about when he preaches in the synagogue at Nazareth.

- ❖ Quoting the prophet Isaiah, he proclaims good news for the poor, *release* to the *captives*, *sight* to the *blind*, and *liberty* to the *oppressed*; that God's promise of *freedom* had been *fulfilled*.
- ❖ Throughout his ministry we see Jesus freeing us from everything that oppresses us – thirst, hunger, loneliness and isolation, disease, spiritual oppression, even sin and death itself.

Freedom is *just* as popular *today* as it was *then*, yet so many people, *even Christians*, struggle with this same message. Why?

- ❖ Here's an example I'll never forget.

While I was home visiting after my first year of seminary, I met a group of college friends at one of our favorite bars near the school.

- ❖ When a guy sitting nearby heard that I was going to be a *priest*, we got into a surprisingly *deep* conversation about the *faith*.
- ❖ I was so excited to talk about the *freedom*, *healing*, and *peace* I was experiencing as my relationship with Jesus got deeper, and how just *tasting* that had really begun to set my life on *fire*.
- ❖ The *longer* we talked, the *more* engaged he *got*, and I could tell that the Holy *Spirit* was speaking to things in his *heart* that he *hadn't* even brought *up*.
- ❖ So then, when our groups started going in different directions, I was a little surprised to hear him say, “That's *awesome*, man, I'm *happy* for you. But *I* just can't be that *good*.”

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Rejecting a relationship with God because “I just can’t be that *good*” is a *tragedy*, because not only is it a total *misunderstanding* of who God *is*, but of who *we* are as well.

God is not the divine *spoilsport* who ruins our *fun*, but a loving *Father* whose joy is to bring about *our* flourishing.

- ❖ When we think “I just *can’t* be that *good*,” it’s like *sulking* because Dad *kept* us from going through the *secret door* that was going to open when we stuck his *keys* in the *electrical* outlet.
- ❖ Or being *upset* that even though he *knew* we wanted to grow up and be a *detective*, he made us go to *school* instead of *practicing* by *pretending* to be *Sherlock Holmes*.

We *need* God because we’re like *little children*.

- ❖ We don’t really understand who we *are* and we can’t tell the difference between *freedom* and *slavery*.
- ❖ So when God draws *near* to us, it’s *not* to make us *less* of who we are, but to make us *more*.

That’s why Paul tells us *not* to *focus* our lives on *gratifying* the desires of the *flesh*.

- ❖ It’s not because the flesh is *bad*; God created *both* our souls *and* our bodies.
- ❖ Then Adam becomes a *living soul* when God breathes his *own divine breath*, his *Spirit*, into him.
- ❖ So when our bodies and souls work together with the Holy Spirit, our *physical* realities help us understand the *deeper spiritual* realities of God’s love, and we can use our *physical* bodies to help build up our *souls*.

When we live by the flesh *alone*, the physical realities *don’t* build up souls or *reveal* the greater *realities* – they *actually* do the *opposite*.

- ❖ For example, uncontrolled sexual desires *don’t* reveal the greater reality of love or prepare us to *receive* it because that’s the opposite of love.

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- ❖ You can't give *away* what you don't *possess*, so you can only *love* to the degree that you can *control* your *own* selfish desires.
- ❖ In fact, the more you equate "*love*" with "*pleasure*," the more you *numb* the desire for the *real thing* and then leave yourself *unable* to live into that kind of relationship when you want to.
- ❖ It *feels* like freedom in the *beginning*, but *ends* in *slavery*.

Now, even if we're not consumed with gratifying the flesh, Paul doesn't let us off the hook.

- ❖ He says that "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit."
- ❖ To be who we really are, those who belong to Jesus, we have to be free to live and walk by the Spirit.

We can't just passively *say* "thy kingdom come, thy will be done," but be ready to make it *happen*.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit will lead us to do this, but we can only respond if we've "*crucified* the flesh"; not *ignored*, *resisted*, or even *wounded*, but *crucified*.
- ❖ It's really easy for us to be satisfied with *ignoring*, *resisting*, or even *wounding* the flesh, but that's *not* what Paul says.
- ❖ If we let a little of the selfishness of the flesh stick around it's like saying that we're totally fulfilled by our marriage and it means everything to us, and so we're faithful 90% of the time.

Now, if you're anything like me, there are times where you think, "Lord, I just can't be *that* good."

- ❖ Pay attention to the times when devotion to Jesus feels like slavery.
- ❖ Ask God to show you *where* he's saving you from *yourself*, where you're *pretending* instead of *living*.

Pray and pray, and don't be discouraged that God has more to offer than you've asked for – instead ask him to help your unbelief, so that you can be free to trust in his love.

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