

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON**

**Fourth Sunday After Pentecost**

**June 28, 2020**

### **Psalm 119:153–160**

**153** Look on my affliction and deliver me,  
for I do not forget your law.

**154** Plead my cause and redeem me;  
give me life according to your promise!

**155** Salvation is far from the wicked,  
for they do not seek your statutes.

**156** Great is your mercy, O Lord;  
give me life according to your rules.

**157** Many are my persecutors and my adversaries,  
but I do not swerve from your testimonies.

**158** I look at the faithless with disgust,  
because they do not keep your commands.

**159** Consider how I love your precepts!  
Give me life according to your steadfast love.

**160** The sum of your word is truth,  
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

### **Old Testament Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 28:5–9**

**5** Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord, **6** and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. **7** Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. **8** The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. **9** As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.”

## **EPISTLE: Romans 7:1–13**

**7** Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? **2** For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. **3** Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

**4** Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. **5** For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our member to bear fruit for death. **6** But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

### **The Law and Sin**

**7** What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” **8** But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. **9** I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. **10** The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. **11** For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. **12** So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

**13** Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

## **HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 10:34–42**

### **Not Peace, but a Sword**

**34** “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. **35** For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. **36** And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. **37** Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. **38** And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. **39** Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

## Rewards

40 “Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.  
41 The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

## Sermon 25 – Fourth Sunday After Pentecost

### “Dead Sin Law”

#### Romans 7:1-13

Dear friends,

What makes something wrong? Is it the rule, or is it wrong before the rules were written down? We all know we have God's law written on our hearts – our conscience – but that isn't perfect. It still suggests that something wrong is something wrong, that right and wrong are not just a matter of what the rules say. That is what Paul is talking about in the epistle lesson. He uses some examples to do it, but he wants to discuss morality. Right and wrong. What is right, and what is wrong, and while his conclusions might be somewhat obvious, the process is as important as the result, something I often need to remember. Why is this important? Because we live in a time where right and wrong are often challenged, and it's good to gird ourselves to meet that challenge, so let's do that.

I won't start at the start, because Paul is using an example of a married woman. If you're married, you're married to the one you're married to and subject to the laws of marriage. The law is only in force so long as the marriage has two people. Death – and Paul uses death specifically – breaks the bond of marriage and releases the woman from her obligations. This is fairly straightforward, and is just building up to the point that Paul makes next.

**“4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so**

**that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.”** So let's talk God's law here. God lays down His law and His requirements for our conduct, and those requirements are demanding. In the Ten Commandments, God makes it clear that He takes first priority, the needs of our neighbor take second priority, and that is that. No appeal, no riders, no wiggle room. That inflexibility is frightening to us, because especially when Jesus begins to speak on the commandments, Jesus makes it very clear that what God basically wants from us is perfection. We know ourselves too well for that, and Paul knows this. That's why he says this. Paul us that we have died to the law through the body of Christ. What does this mean? Earlier in the letter Paul says that we have died with Christ. So when Christ was crucified, we were too. To die to the law means that like the married woman who loses her husband, we don't have to follow the law anymore.

Paul is describing the mechanics here of how Christ accomplishes what He accomplishes. Again, the process is as important as the result. God wants us to be perfect, and we can't. Since we can't be perfect, the Ten Commandments become an impossible burden for us to keep, even keeping the first of those commandments is just way too much for us. God wants to be the number one priority of our life, and none of us can honestly say we've done that. God knows this, so He makes us die with Jesus so God's law, and the ways we fail it, don't apply to us anymore. Instead, we bear fruit. Law doesn't produce good. It forces good, and there is a distinct difference between the two. Doing something because you're obligated to just isn't the same as doing something because you *want* to. You all know this. So, we die with Jesus, and in dying with Jesus, we start producing good spontaneously, out of our own hearts, instead of being forced to do it by threat of punishment. This is pleasing to God and clearly the best of good news for us sinners.

Paul then describes the complication of being sinners produces in this rather straightforward process. **“5 For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. 6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”** Paul says our sinful passions were aroused by the law. It is that crazy illogical phenomenon I described last week, where when you lay down the rules clearly and purely, people start to get worse. They break them. Where there's wiggle room, there's room for people to act the way they want to. But when the rules are clear and vividly spelled out, we're more apt to break them because the rules get in the way of what we want. When God says “Thou Shalt Not” our human hearts immediately answer with “ooooo I want it. I shall.” It's crazy, yes, but its also sin, and sin is a disease that doesn't adhere to cause-and-effect. We are by nature lawbreakers. We obey *our* law, not God's law, because being a sinner means we want to be the one making laws.

Paul explains this more in what he says next. **“7 What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.”** The problem isn't the rules, Paul says. The rules are just telling us what is good and what is bad. How often have you broken the rules, gotten into trouble for it, and thought, “Man, these rules are stupid! Why do they make these rules?” There is a road where I want to college, called Golfside. You take Golfside to go into Ypsilanti, which is where the donut shop is, the Hungry Howie's pizza is, and where Tower Inn pub is. In the language I speak, when you have a place that

can give you donuts, pizza, and 32-oz Killians for cheap, you end up basically living there. I spent a lot of college time on Golfside road. Golfside road is two lanes on both sides, wide, spacious, plenty of room to stretch. It is also 35mph, which I can tell you from personal experience is way way too slow for a road that size. You feel like you are genuinely poking along. Yet the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti police department monitors that road like it owes them something. I have so many times thought that the speed limit was dumb for a road that size. That is sin. That is what Paul is talking about. When the rules are clear, when the rules get in the way, we get mad and want to break them all the more. Put up a wall around something, and human nature immediately wants to get a peek at what's at the other side of that wall.

Same thing with God's rules. **“For apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. 12 So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”** God is holy and good, and thus the rules that He makes, the words that He speaks, are equally holy and good. Yet those same rules, those words, that law, that is what's killing us. It condemns us as sinners. That doesn't make the rules bad, it makes us bad. It doesn't make God evil, it proves we are the twisted ones. **“13 Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.”**

So what do we do with all of this? We stand in awe of Jesus and what He has accomplished. I have often thought of God's restrictions as too tight, too inflexible. I don't know that I have

actually, out loud, called God evil, but I have called Him uncaring, rigid, too committed to this impossible standard. I can't be alone in that. The human heart wants its own rules and its own way, it's willing to follow the rules, but only when forced and sometimes forced extra-hard. God takes those very same rules and that very same heart and He makes them work for us rather than against us.

The rules condemn and kill us because they reveal our faults. They reveal our sins, our perversions, the ways we've screwed up. Broadcast them on a screen in church and we would all be ashamed. Yet those rules aren't what's evil, they show us that we're evil. Through that revelation, we have no choice but to turn to God and ask Him to save us from those faults, and Christ is there to do that. Across the board, this shows us a way out of a broken system, a system we broke and keep breaking every time we try to put the pieces together. Christ died, and so we die. Christ rose, and so we rise. Christ bore fruit for God, we do too.

God is good, we are not. God saves us by telling us that we are not good, and then He offers a way out of that not-goodness. Through those words, Jesus comes to us, and then He makes us good. Now the rules become a delight. They become an expression of virtue rather than something we are sullenly compelled to do. Now, the Ten Commandments give us Christians wonderful guidance in how we can love and serve our neighbor. Compulsion becomes love. Resentment transforms into love. Alienation into togetherness around Christ. Damnation into salvation.

That is what Paul describes mechanically. Through that process, we see the extent of our problem, and the extent of the solution. Through that, we see good rules broken by bad men, made good again by the blood of Jesus. You and me. Once lawbreakers, now dead and free from

the law. Once the bad guys, made good because we aren't defined by how we break the rules, but how Christ keeps the rules. Once slaves to death and the law, now lovers of the free expression of Christian love. That is what He has made us.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.