

SERMON SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2020

GUEST PASTOR FISH

2020 Pentecost 2A

Romans 7:1-13

“The Resurrecting Christ brings Real Freedom”

Vincent Van Gogh felt trapped. For a year he had been in a mental institution. He was often confined to his room. But He was not only trapped in his room but also inside his own mind. He suffered from severe mental distress. Where could he go for relief? What could set him free? In the midst of his suffering, his brother Theo sent him a letter. Included was a copy of a Rembrandt painting, *The Raising of Lazarus*. In that letter and picture, Van Gogh discovered life and hope, a chance for freedom.

In the picture, Jesus stands over the grave of Lazarus, a powerful figure. At his feet, the shrouded Lazarus rises. All eyes are on him. But Jesus stands- He is *the Resurrection and the Life*. He is the resurrecting Christ. From Him comes power. From Him comes freedom even from death itself.

Our text this morning is part of another letter. A letter that proclaims freedom on Christ. At the beginning of Romans, Paul proclaims that Jesus is the Son of God by *His resurrection from the dead*. Paul serves a Savior who freed Himself from the bonds of death. But Paul discovered something more. On the Damascus Road Paul met Jesus and found that Jesus is not only the “resurrected Christ but He is also The Resurrecting Christ. Through His resurrection Jesus changes lives. He freed Mary from sorrow at the tomb. He freed Thomas from doubt in the room. He freed Peter from despair at the lake. He freed them to serve Him. And so Paul was set free on the Damascus Road. It is this power that Paul proclaims to us today. Paul turns our eyes toward Jesus, for He has the power to set us free. What does this freedom look like?

First, proclaims that we are set free from the condemning power of the Law. In the Rembrandt painting, the people’s eyes are looking everywhere but to Jesus. For many today, they look to the Law of God as the source to life and freedom. Now the Law is good. The Law is spiritual. If I live in perfect obedience to it I can make myself pleasing to God. But to do this means I have lost sight of Jesus.

Paul writes this letter so that no one can see the Law without seeing Jesus. Paul know the terrifying power of the Law. It has the power to awaken our sin. (ever walked past a bench marked wet paint without the temptation to touch it?) God’s Law is good but our lives are not. The Law “*arouses our passions*” and then it condemns us. By trying to hold on to the Law, we end up dying. The Law cannot save us, it can only show our need to be saved.

Therefore, Paul points us to Jesus. Jesus is the One who dies holding on to us. Jesus saw us in our sin and offered His life for our salvation. We WERE sinners in the hands of an angry God. Now we ARE saints in the hands of our gracious Savior. How do we know? We have only to look to our baptism, for there we are joined to Jesus in His death and His resurrection.

Paul, however, goes beyond saving us from the Law. Freedom means more than saving **from** something. For many in our culture, even for some Christians, that is how they define freedom. They see it as being able to do anything you want. Consider God’s design human sexuality. It has been totally redefined in the human lens of the 21st Century. Now it even acceptable to

question one's sexual orientation or to change it, essentially rewriting God's Law. Yet in this redefinition God remains good and loving, pleased with our choices. But this thinking is delusional and deadly! God's Law never changes. We can ignore it, deny it or redefine it, but we are all still accountable to it. So Paul this morning wants to remind you that God rule over all of His creation and you are still accountable to Him. But here is Good news.

Christ Jesus in His death claimed you in His death bringing you complete forgiveness for all the times you fail to follow His Law. But more, in His resurrection He has also raised you to new life to experience real freedom. For in Him real freedom is more than **freedom from**, it is **freedom to**. Paul writes, "*now my brothers, you have died to the Law through the Body of Christ so that you may belong to Him who has been raised in order to bear fruit.*" Paul again turns our attention to the "resurrecting Christ." For He forms us, shapes us by His Spirit to live as His people to reveal His ways. Think of what the message of the cross and empty tomb can mean in this time of political unrest and social upheaval. There we can find real help, real healing, real forgiveness. There we can love because He first loved us. There we can serve because He first served us. There, when we feel powerless, He empowers us.

When Vincent Van Gogh received the picture, he was inspired by its power. He couldn't put it into words but he was moved to paint his own raising of Lazarus. He focused on one detail. Martha has removed the veil from Lazarus and he begins to see the world again. But if you look carefully at his revealed face, it is thin and pale, with a red beard. It is the face of Van Gogh himself! Now he is beginning to experience new life and freedom.

Paul invites us this morning to live in this freedom of the resurrecting Christ. In Him we have died and been raised to life in His Spirit. Through His presence in Word and Sacrament we continue to be shaped and formed for service in His Kingdom until that day when we rest in His presence for all eternity. Amen.