



Sunday Devotion for Martin Luther Church

6th Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2020

A warm welcome to watch this devotion and related videos at
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLIjEQnirqCMNCApVteTXe299zJoohU_wn

A. GATHERING

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Words of Welcome

Good morning everyone!

My name is Silke Fahl and I'm one of the three vicars here at Martin Luther Church. As part of our sermon series "Summer with Romans", we are looking today at the beginning of chapter 8. And more precisely what it means to either live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit.



So let us celebrate this service in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray:

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.
Amen.

B. WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

Psalm 65:1-13

¹You are to be praised, O God, in Zion;
to you shall vows be fulfilled.

²To you, the one who answers prayer,
to you all flesh shall come.

³Our sins are stronger than we are,
but you blot out our transgressions.

⁴Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there!
They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your temple.

⁵Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation,
O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans far away.

⁶You make firm the mountains by your power;
you are girded about with might.

⁷You still the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of their waves, and the clamour of the peoples.

⁸Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvellous signs;
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.

⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water.

You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.

¹⁰You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.

¹¹You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.

¹²May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing,
and the hills be clothed with joy.

¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain;
let them shout for joy and sing.

Amen.

Readings: Romans 8:1-11 (The Inclusive Bible)

¹There is no longer any condemnation, however, for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²The law of the Spirit—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—has freed you from the law of sin and death. ³What the Law was powerless to do because human nature made it so weak, God did—by sending the Only Begotten in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in the flesh. ⁴In this way, the just demands of the Law could be fulfilled in us, who live not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵Those who live according to the flesh have their mind set on the things of the flesh; those who live by the Spirit, on things of the Spirit. ⁶The mind of the flesh is death, but that of the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷The mind of the flesh stands in opposition to God; it is not subject to God's law—indeed, it cannot be, ⁸since those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, then though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit lives because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then the One who raised Christ from the dead will also bring your mortal bodies to life through the Spirit dwelling in you.

Sermon by Vicar Silke Fahl

As with pretty much every part of Paul's letter to the Romans, there is a plethora of things to talk about in these eleven verses. I won't even try to get to everything, but a lot of the things are interconnected and hopefully we'll all have a better understanding of this complex text at the end of this sermon.

One of the things I noticed while reading this text again in preparation for today is how the language changes. Or rather how the emotions within me change throughout the passage. It starts with the positive and affirming statements of *"no condemnation"* and *"the law of the Spirit—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus—has freed you from the law of sin and death."* Only to then talk about condemnation and the sin of flesh and how bad it is to live *"according to the flesh"*. Which, of course, raises the question: Are we condemned or are we not? After all, we are not only spirit, but flesh as well.

The answer to that lies in the last three verses: *We are in the spirit for "if Christ is in you, then though the body is dead because of sin, the spirit lives because of righteousness."* Or to say it with Martin Luther we are *simul iustus et peccator*. We are simultaneously justified and sinner.

In many ways it is a very affirming passage, a morality boost even. But what does that mean for us? Can we just lean back and not worry about sin and living in the flesh anymore? I don't think so. That is what the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer refers to as "cheap grace". It's the type of grace where all that is said is that we are all saved and that we have to do nothing for it.

And yes, we are all loved by God the way we are and we are redeemed through Christ's death on the cross. And yes, we can't add to it by any deeds or works and we cannot free ourselves from sin. But not only should the knowledge of being loved and redeemed lead us to doing good in the world. We also have to choose a life in the spirit. Or as Paul says in verse 6, *"To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace."*

What does that mean, though? Is it a choice we make once either way and then that's it? By no means! It is a lifelong commitment and a choice we have to make again and again. I'd say it's like setting your mind on being ... let's say a pianist, a hockey player or whatever else you aspire to be. You have to set your mind on it, work towards it and even when it's tough and you feel like it may not be worth it you have to keep choosing it.

That, at least for me and probably for others as well, leads to the question: But what exactly am I choosing between? What does it even mean to *"live according to the flesh"* or to *"live according to the Spirit"*?

To me *"living according to the flesh"* has to do with those things in our lives that can be egocentric, selfish and even narcissistic. For example, when you only focus on your personal needs or gaining wealth or owning the newest and best of everything. None of those things are per se evil, but if they are our sole focus, they separate us from God and that separation is what sin is.

On the other hand, *"living according to the Spirit"* to me means thinking of other people as well. Loving our neighbours. Standing up for social justice. Trying to protect God's creation. This looks different for all of us and we can't all invest the same amount of time and energy into it. Yet by doing what we *can* do, we set our minds to live in the Spirit and thus Christ dwells within us.

Another thing that comes to mind when I think of to *"live according to the Spirit"* is a word from the Bantu languages: Ubuntu/botho. If you ask a person who speaks this language what Ubuntu/botho means "they will probably list the virtues to which a person in these societies is expected to aspire – such as compassion, generosity, honesty, magnanimity, empathy, understanding, forgiveness and the ability to share."¹ It can also be translated to "I am, because you are" and is a short version of the sentence "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (my apologies if I'm mispronouncing it!). It means that a person is only a person through other people. Or to quote John Donne, "No man is an island entire on itself." We always live in relation to other people and thus should not focus solely on what *w*e need.

1. <https://en.unesco.org/courier/octobre-decembre-2011/i-am-because-you-are>

And while we aren't able to always do everything we want to do support our neighbours, speak up against hatred and injustice, there are things like showing compassion, being understanding, forgiving each other that we can and should do. Not at our own expense of course or by letting other people walk all over us. In fact, we need boundaries as they are not only the key to self-love, but also to treating others with loving kindness. For if we don't have boundaries, we'll build resentment towards the people around us. And no one can treat someone they resent with loving kindness.

One way to treat others with loving kindness is by assuming that the other person is doing the best they can. For if I assume people are doing the best they can, it makes *my* life better. The generosity to assume the best about people is an almost inherently selfish act. Because the life you change first is your own. I'm the one who becomes more compassionate and empathetic.

However, generosity, compassion and empathy cannot exist without boundaries. To quote Brené Brown: "What boundaries need to be in place for me to stay in my integrity and make the most generous assumptions about you?" (2) In short: boundaries are the key to self-love and treating others with loving kindness. And that in turn is, in my opinion, the essence of "*living according to the Spirit*".

Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your mind in Christ Jesus."

Amen.

Hymn: Songs of Thankfulness and Praise ELW 310

Songs of thankfulness and praise, / Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise;
manifested by the star / to the sages from afar,
branch of royal David's stem / in thy birth at Bethlehem:
anthems be to thee addressed, / God in flesh made manifest.

Manifest at Jordan's stream, / prophet, priest, and king supreme;
and at Cana wedding guest / in thy Godhead manifest;
manifest in pow'r divine, / changing water into wine;
anthems be to thee addressed, / God in flesh made manifest.

Manifest in making whole / weakened body, fainting soul;
manifest in valiant fight, / quelling all the devil's might;
manifest in gracious will, / ever bringing good from ill:
anthems be to thee addressed, / God in flesh made manifest.

Grant us grace to see thee, Lord, / present in thy holy word;
grace to imitate thee now / and be pure, as pure art thou;
that we might become like thee / at thy great epiphany,
and may praise thee, ever blest, / God in flesh made manifest.

2. <https://youtu.be/5U3VcgUzqil>

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for pastors and lay people in congregation that have been serving their communities for a long time and in newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by each others witness to the faith we share.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding God, care for all who are in need, especially for Rudy Rietsch. For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries especially our Corona care callers and the newly started mask project and deepen relationships with the wider community.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Loving God, we pray for all who celebrated their birthdays in the past week, especially for Lydia, Anna, Rainer, Ernie, Philipp, Richard, Rudolf, Anneli, Hans-Joachim, Christa, Cosima, Doris und Astrid. Bless them as they walk into a new year of their lives. Surround them with your love and your grace.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed by thy name

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

**And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
And the power, and the glory,
Forever and ever.
Amen.**

C. SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.
The Lord look upon you and give you peace.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the good news.
Thanks be to God.

Announcements

In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak, **all meetings and worship services are taking place virtually.**

- Sunday [Video Devotions](#) are on our [YouTube Channel](#). Please subscribe and comment.
- German [Radio Devotions](#) on our website and Sundays at 9.30 am on CHLO Radio AM 530
- [Virtual Sunday Coffee Hour](#) at 11:00 am on Zoom (invitation sent by office)
- [Sunday School lessons](#) on our website (April-June)
- [Virtual Coffee Shop Talk](#), Mondays 7:00-9:00 pm on Zoom led by Vicar Silke Fahl. Email vicarfahl@martinluther.ca to sign up.
- [Virtual Prayer Circle](#), Wednesdays 5:30-6:00 pm through Zoom led by Solveig Christina Voss; we also have a Prayer Request Wall in the Church Foyer
To request a prayer or join our prayer circle, email prayers@martinluther.ca.
- A Summer with Romans:
 - ◊ Sermon Series until August 30
 - ◊ Bible Study: Wednesdays until August 26. A 30-minute weekly discussion of Paul's letter to the Romans. Two opportunities: Roman Coffee at 8:30 am and Roman Lunch at 12:15 pm. Email vicarsmith@martinluther.ca to sign up.
- [Give Peas a Chance](#)- A grow some, give some movement hosted by Martin Luther and Redeemer Lutheran with donated seeds.
- [Masks for Good](#) - a project to ensure that everyone who wants to protect themselves from the virus has access to masks. Everyone who wants to get involved can find an activity that suits them. Contact Vicar Adam McComb if you'd like to volunteer, vicarmccomb@martinluther.ca
- [Corona-Care Calls](#)- Volunteers are continuing to call you with more information and to understand your needs. Let us know if you'd like to join the call team!
- Please phone or email the church office:
 - ◊ if we can help you in any way
 - ◊ if you'd like to volunteer by doing Sunday readings
 - ◊ with feedback on what we're offering
 - ◊ to support our church and [donate](#). Best ways are PAR or send cheque to church office.

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*Member of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) &
Partnered with Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD)*