

## **It is finished.**

A sermon for the Fifth Sunday of the Season of Pentecost

Romans 6:1-11

In this season of Pentecost we have been focusing on the Book of Romans. We have seen that Romans chapters 3-5 are all about the cross. We have seen the huge importance that it is all done. The solution is an objective kind of thing. It is symbolized by that verse in the Gospel of John – 19:30: “It is finished.” The work of the cross is done – for us. That is settled.

Now we come to the question: What are the effects of the cross? What about in us and to us now? This chapter Romans 6:1-11 says it is to us and for us and in us now in Baptism. Romans 6:5 states: “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (As we know, the Greek idiom requires the word “certainly.”) We are confident in the hope that we have.

At his father’s funeral a young man told the pastor that he really “heard” that verse for the first time, and he was grateful because he had not realized that if we had been united with Christ in a death like his (in Baptism), then we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

This verse, Romans 6:5, isn’t an isolated verse. We can find the same throughout the New Testament. Even here in Romans 6:8 it says: “But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him.” Then 6:11: “You must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” We have this remarkable hope, this confidence, this certainty in him.

Luther says that Romans is Paul’s commentary on Galatians. Paul faced all kinds of opponents who said: “How can you say that?” One of the objections is already there in Romans 3:8 (6:1,15), where he asks: “And why not do evil that good may come? – as some people slanderously charge us with saying.”

And that is how Paul begins this section in chapter 6:1b where it says “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” Then he uses a phrase which means: “God forbid that you should talk that way!” In 6:15 he writes in a similar way: “Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?” Again he uses this Greek expression which means “God forbid!” But this is the way many people figure: “I’ve

got it made. What I do doesn't matter; the more I sin, the more grace there is so let us sin that grace may abound."

It is similar to a famous statement by the German Heinrich Heine, who on his deathbed is reported to have said: "God will forgive. He has to because that's his nature." God is bound to. God is love, grace, no matter what. It's as if you are playing a game and have a "Get out of jail free" card. What this all really means is that the Lord is no longer Lord. This is the sin of presumption, breaking the First Commandment. The Lord is no longer Lord.

Two illustrations: One is the parable of the rich man who had a vineyard in Luke 20:9-16. He decided to go away and rented out the vineyard. After a year he sent somebody to collect the rent and those who had had the vineyard beat him up and sent him back to his master. The next year he sent another servant and this time they killed him. The third year he sent his own son. As the parable goes on, the renters said to themselves: "This is the heir. If we kill him, we have everything." So they did. The point of the parable is: What do you think the Lord will do when he returns?

It is similar to another illustration, the question of marriage. A couple gets married. They are legally bound together and they commit their lives to each other. After a week of marriage, the husband says: "I'm going away for the weekend with my former girlfriend." And the wife says: "Hey, you don't get it."

The problem with these illustrations is that they make it seem as if in spite of the fact that we are free in Christ and certain of salvation, we are under a new law.

Therefore it is important to see what this means as Paul spells it out in Romans 6:4, as well as in the rest of chapter 6:12-23 because he then says that we are in Christ so that we may walk in newness of life. That means, as he spells it out using the illustration of a slave: You were enslaved to sin. There was nothing you could do about it. But now you are a slave to Christ and that changes everything.

Luther changes the image but makes the same point. It is like being a horse. You are either ridden by one or ridden by the other. But you are not on your own.

Paul writes this in a different way in 1 Cor 6:19b-20: "You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

How does this work? There are some biblical illustrations for this that help us. One is that little parable about the pearl of great price (Matt 13:45-46). Another is about

the treasure in the field (Matt 13:44). In both parables when the man finds the pearl and the treasure, he didn't need to be told what to do or worry about what to do next. He sold everything he had it and held on it. That's what it's about.

We have a saying among us: "Don't put all your eggs in one basket." But we could rephrase this: "Put all your eggs in one basket and then watch that basket."

It can be also seen in the illustration about an organ transplant. Through modern medicine doctors are able to do kidney transplants, liver transplants, heart transplants, and the like. When there is a transplant, something happens. Not only does one have a new lease on life, a life that is really different than the life before, but you will be under a kind of discipline in two ways. You have to come regularly to have the transplant checked, and you don't miss those appointments because you don't feel like going. The appointments are crucial.

The second is that you have to receive anti-rejection infusions. And you can't say: "I've got it made; I had the transplant. That was enough. Now I can do whatever I like." As a matter of fact, there is a real discipline and a real change. Your life has changed and it belongs to a different situation.

The Christian life is like that. God claims us in Baptism; it is finished, like a transplant. And we come to church regularly to receive from him, our Surgeon and Savior, his forgiveness, which sustains us for life in this world and the next.

Another illustration is about a real couple from the Midwest who had a little girl, and it was discovered that she had a brain tumor. They went through the usual route of going to their local doctor and then specialists at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN who determined that they could not operate on her. Then the couple heard there was a surgeon in New York City that did experimental surgery on tumors of the sort their little girl had. They contacted him and he agreed to do the surgery. They went to New York and he operated on her; the surgery was successful and he was paid accordingly.

For the couple and their daughter the surgery dramatically changed their lives and they were forever grateful. If the surgeon had said: "Please come to New York every year and mow my lawn while I am gone on vacation," they would have been happy to do so. What he had done for them was the pearl of great price, the treasure, and it changed everything because as it says in Romans 6:4: ". . . as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."

In our Lutheran tradition we make a distinction between certainty and security. We talk about the fact that we have certainty in him. Certainty is that which is outside of ourselves. The word "security" is used to represent that there is something in us that we have control of. Therefore we have security in ourselves.

In the way Paul describes the Christian life, we have certainty. We shall certainly be resurrected with him when we have been baptized in him. Not because of some mysterious knowledge of God. All that we know about God, as Luther points out, is what he has done in Jesus Christ. That is what revelation is. That which is outside of us gives us that certainty. But of course it is certainty in the cross. It is not a security in us that we control and that we understand. It continues to be by faith in him. That is why we use the phrase "outside of us, in spite of us." That makes it very different from the kind of thing where we say: "We do it. We've got it made. It's in us." Rather, we have new freedom and new life because we belong to him. Amen