

The Seventh Sunday after Trinity
Mark 8:1-9, Romans 6:19-23, Genesis 2:7-17

Paul presents the Christian life perfectly in our Epistle reading:

“Just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.” (Rom 6:19)

Instead of presenting yourselves to impurity, you present yourselves to righteousness. This is nothing other than repentance. In repentance you turn away from sin and present yourself to Christ. Repentance is the life of the Christian.

You know this doesn't make for an easy life.

The Old Testament and Gospel readings are a perfect example of why this life is hard.

The Old Testament reading reminds us that God made fruit for us to eat and it was indeed “very good.” But He restricted Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

God made us as physical creatures. We need the sustenance of food to survive. The gift of food is a wonderful gift of God that He still provides for believer and unbeliever alike. In the Gospel reading, we see that even though the crowd following Jesus around was full of believers and unbelievers, Jesus had compassion on them and fed them to the full from seven loaves of bread and a few small fish. The testimony of this incredible miracle tells us that “they ate and were satisfied.” (v. 8) We know that some of the listeners were unbelievers because we're told in John that they were looking for a bread king.

God has established a regular order for providing daily bread. Farmers farm. Ranchers ranch. Butchers butcher. Grocers grocer. Doctors doctor. Dentists dentist. Mechanics build and fix stuff. Cobblers make and fix shoes. In this normal way, God provides for the daily bread of all people; believers and unbelievers alike. Jesus didn't come to establish the family or government which provide the framework for all vocations. He established those in Genesis 1 and 2. Some families are more pious than others and hence work better. Some governments are more just than others and hence protect people's daily bread better. Sin has impacted both family and the government so that they don't work as they ought to. But Jesus reminds us that He is in control and injustice and family failings won't last forever. He will make everything right when He comes again in glory.

But Jesus came in the flesh for the same reason He fed the 4,000. He had compassion on us. If there's one Greek word to remember it's to have compassion. *Σπλαγχνίζομαι* means to have compassion. It literally means that your guts twist on themselves. It's very graphic which is probably why I remember it so easily and like it so much. Jesus' guts were twisted with compassion over our pain and suffering. The daily bread required to fix our pain and suffering is not bread and fish, but the heavenly bread that comes down from heaven.

He had to come and put the yoke of humanity upon Himself. Unlike the first Adam who succumbed to temptation, the second Adam lived a perfect life. He kept the Law of God perfectly in the midst of temptation and suffering. Unlike the first Israel who was unfaithful, the second Israel was faithful to death, even death on the cursed tree. He was the spotless Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. He doesn't distribute the forgiveness of sins through the farmer or rancher or doctor, but has established His bride, the church, where He distributes this much needed daily bread of the forgiveness of sins. Bread gets moldy and fish rot, but the forgiveness of sins lasts forever and never perishes. Just as much as bread and fish are part of daily bread, so is the forgiveness of sins.

God did not make us mere physical creatures. We are spiritual creatures as well. Bread and fish feed your bodies and the forgiveness of sins feeds your souls. And there is a beautiful symmetry to this.

Satan deceived Adam and Eve through daily bread. Daily bread is a wonderful creation of God for our use, yet how often does it prove as an idol or stumbling block for us? Consider alcohol. It has ensnared so many to a destructive sin filled life that has left so many ashamed of what they have done. Consider food. It has ensnared so many to a destructive, gluttonous life that has left so many ashamed of their body. Consider sex. It has ensnared so many with promiscuity and pornography to a life of debauchery that has left so many ashamed of what they have caught or what they have done. Satan still uses daily bread to tempt Christians into a life of debauchery and shame. If he doesn't get you with alcohol, he'll try to get you with food. If he doesn't get you with food or alcohol, he'll try to get you with sex. Satan takes the good gifts of God and perverts them to entice you to become a slave to sin.

And if you've been caught up in any kind of pet sin, then you know you do become a slave to it. When all you can think about is food or alcohol or sex, you become enslaved to a life of misery and shame. What's the answer to this problem?

The world would have you change the Word of God so that you can excuse your slavery to sin. Why do you think the LGBTQ community works so hard to normalize perversity and debauchery? And make no mistake, that's what it is: perversity and debauchery. And it wants to suck you down into it's cesspit of sin.

Yet so many so-called Christians have sex outside of marriage, that it's easy for them to point a finger at the LGBTQ community and ignore their own sin. It's shameful that the divorce rate among Christians is as high as it is. It's right over 25% and varies slightly depending on your denomination.

How can so many Christians, a full quarter, knowingly sin against God through divorce. Christians rightly preach against the evil of abortion, but many blindly take birth control. The church, including the LCMS, used to be strongly against birth control. It is shameful that we have bowed to cultural pressures and relented in calling birth control what it is... sin. If Onan were alive, he would whole heartedly agree that birth control is sin. Read Genesis 38 today if you don't remember who Onan is. When you separate the sexual act from marriage and the possibility of having kids, you are sinning. It is shameful that so many Christians use birth control and refuse to have kids. So many of our young Christians aren't even seeking marriage. Paul warns that celibacy is a gift only for very few people (1 Cor 7:1-16), but so many of our young people act as if anyone can have this gift. And then they are surprised and ashamed when they fall into sexual sin. This is shameful too.

Sexual sins are especially pernicious, but how many fall into the slavery of alcohol or food addiction? And the world would like to normalize these sinful activities too.

But the answer to the problem of sexual sins and any other sin is *not* to remain silent or only rail against one sin. The answer is to examine and hear the Word of God and know it better and better. So that you can warn the unrepentant including yourself. So that you can comfort troubled consciences including yours. And so that you can live a chaste life.

And this is the first step of repentance: examining and hearing the Word of God. God teaches us through the author of Hebrews that:

“The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from His sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.” (Heb 4:12-13)

You also know this as the second function of the law, or the mirror. It convicts you of sin. The Word of God doesn't sugar coat sin. It doesn't turn a blind eye to your sin. It points it out for what it is: a terrible act in thought, word, or deed against God who created you, redeemed you, and sanctifies you.

There's only one answer for sin and that is the forgiveness of sins. But you are beloved children of God. You know that God is extravagant with the forgiveness of sins. He provides it through so many ways and it is always available to you.

Paul says to present yourselves as slaves to righteousness. But what if you look at your life and do not see that you are a slave to righteousness? What's the answer to this problem?

Is it try harder?

Is it try smarter?

Paul's answer to this is quite surprising. At first blush, it sounds like Paul is saying you need to do something or act in a certain way. Doesn't "present yourselves" sound like you need to do something. And when Paul talks about the wages of sin, he's saying you've earned eternal death. But when he talks about the other side of the coin, that is the righteous life, he says "the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

He's saying the motivation for good works or fruit of salvation or sanctification, whatever you want to call it, is to look to Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of our faith." (Heb 12:2)

Do you remember the WWJD bracelets? They got it so wrong but not completely wrong. The idea behind the WWJD bracelets is that you would ask yourself the question "What would Jesus do?" when faced with a moral dilemma.

The first problem with this approach is that we aren't Jesus. Jesus acted from pure motives from a pure heart and acted perfectly. He did this to save sinners from sin, death, and the devil. We cannot do what Jesus did. We cannot even save ourselves from sin, death, and the devil.

The second problem with this approach is that it asks the wrong question. When I am presented with my neighbor in need, my question is not what would Jesus do, or what do I want to do, but what does my neighbor need. And this gets at the little part that the WWJD bracelet had right.

We are to follow the example of Jesus in regard to humility and service. When I ask the question, what does my neighbor need, I am acting from a place of humility. The neighbor in front of me and their need is more important than my own. And God has placed them in my life so that I may serve them. I saw this well meaning, but ultimately stupid, meme on Facebook that you have to take care of yourself before taking care of others. That's not what God says. He says, "so you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what is our duty.'" (Luke 17:10) Your life in Christ is a life very much like His in the fact that it is a life of humility and service. And just as Christ was exalted during His resurrection and ascension, you will be exalted and raised again in the new heavens and earth. You have the promise of the Almighty Creator and Redeemer that He will vindicate you on that great day.

And when you fail to act from humility and service, the answer to that is to look to Christ on the cross and receive the fruit of His sacrifice. The only answer to sin is the forgiveness of sins. The only answer to failure, a sneaky word for sin, is the forgiveness of sins. The only answer to shortcomings, a euphemism for sin, is the forgiveness of sins.

This is the life of the Christian, also know as living daily in your baptism, daily repentance and the reception of forgiveness of sins. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature." (14: 20)

This only happens with the examination and hearing of Scripture and the lavish application of forgiveness of sins. But some of you have sinned grievously in the past. What about you?

Remember two things. First God remembers your sin no more once it is forgiven. "As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgression from us." (Ps 103:12) Do you remember the purity rings? They are a bad idea because they look at things legalistically, but there is a gem of a great idea in there. People who had fallen into the sin of sexual impurity would repent and wear a purity ring. They were made fun of by the world, but they understood this wonderful verse from the Psalter. God remembers your sin no more and you are pure in His eyes in Christ.

Second, remember what makes you worthy to kneel before your God and receive His true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. It's not that you have cleaned yourself up or that you have done some rituals or physical practices. No, "that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'"

You are a child of God. As our Hymn of the Day puts it, "You are His chosen generation." You are truly worthy to kneel before Him and receive the bread that surpasses the bread 2,000 years ago that He fed to 4,000 people in a desolate place. Come and receive the daily bread that is above all daily bread. It is the healing balm for your souls.

In Jesus' name. Amen.