**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**June 28th – The Third Sunday after Trinity**

**“The ‘Presents’ of God” (Romans 6:12-23)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope you’re all doing well, and that you survived our mini-heatwave.*

*You may have seen in the press that the Prime Minister gave permission last Tuesday for places of worship to open for services from July 4th, albeit under social distancing and Covid-prevention hygiene measures. The Government has not yet issued any guidance about what these measures will need to be, and the restrictions under which we will have to hold any services. Once they have done this, the Church of England will in turn issue its guidance, which is what we must follow, applying it to our context.*

*I think it’s fair to say that starting services in church again is going to be complex. We must do so with sensitivity, recognising that some will still not be able to access them, and also that many have valued our online Sunday services and social gatherings after. However, we must also acknowledge what we’ve lived through during these last months, and the grief and loss that have impacted so many.*

*I will be in contact with you all, once our Wardens and I have agreed our plans. In the meantime, may you be greatly blessed this week.*

*With my love and prayers,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

God our saviour, look on this wounded world
in pity and in power;
hold us fast to your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
**Amen.**

**Take My Life
Sung by Jake Broughton (Whatton) & Rose Tomlinson (Orston), accompanied by Deborah Davies**

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise,

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love;
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee,

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee,

Take my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose,

Take my will, and make it Thine;
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart; it is Thine own;
It shall be Thy royal throne,

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee,

Frances Havergal

**Bible Reading: Romans 6:12-23
(New Revised Standard Version)**

**Read by David McCall**

*12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. 14 For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.*

*15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, 18 and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19 I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.*

*20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21 So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22 But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

**Sermon: “The ‘Presents’ of God” – Rev. Tim Chambers**
When I was growing up, I was incredibly fortunate to receive a succession of wonderful hand-made presents from my Uncle, many of which are still in good use today. First came a beautiful, large wooden box for – as it proclaimed in large coloured letters - “Tim’s Toys”. Then followed a fantastic multi-storey car park for all my Matchbox cars.

The bar had been set pretty high in terms of the quality of every single present I was given. So, by the time Christmas 1976 arrived, this seven-year-old was convinced that his request to Uncle Steve for a fort for my toy soldiers was without question going to be met, and that my present would be little short of spectacular. I already had in my mind’s eye elegant turrets at every corner; battlements for my men-at-arms to patrol; and definitely a fully functioning drawbridge over which the knights would ride on their splendid chargers.

Christmas day arrived; as he did every year, Uncle Steve came with my Grandmother to our house and, after the turkey and Christmas pudding, the post-lunch present giving ritual started. I looked at the pile of wrapped objects below the tree. Nothing like a fort there. The unwrapping began. I became more and more anxious.

I went upstairs, and rummaged through all the ‘secret’ places I knew my parents hid our Christmas presents before the day itself. Nothing. I asked Uncle Steve for his keys, convinced that my fort must be in the car boot. Once again, nothing.

To this day, I have absolutely no recollection of what gift Uncle Steve did give me for Christmas that year. All I do remember is the disappointment that only a small child can take to their heart, when something so longed-for never arrives.

The post-script, of course, is that a couple of years ago, Steve confessed to me that there is still a half-built fort in their attic, from 43 Christmases ago. He had planned give it to me, but just bit off more than he could chew, and simply ran out of time before the day itself. I hope that it’ll be retrieved and re-purposed, maybe with some bright paint and streaming flags, for Princess Elsa’s castle for Esther – redeemed for a new generation!

Humanly-given gifts – even if they do actually arrive in the right decade! – can cause us to jump for joy, or make our hearts swell with gratitude to the giver. But the gift with which Paul brings our passage this morning to a close – God’s gift to us all of “eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” is a gift unlike any other ever given.

Our reading this morning comes to a climax in this declaration, and its perhaps even more famous – or infamous - counterpart:

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

St. Paul has reasoned his way along a pretty challenging theological pathway, to arrive at this glorious declaration. In fact today’s reading is very much a continuation of where the Lectionary left off last week – so much so that we started this morning with “Therefore…”, linking us back directly into Paul’s discourse that we looked at last Sunday, on being “dead to sin” and “alive in Christ”.

Paul seems to revel in these dramatic counterpoints and opposites, but his point is to bring into high relief the glorious reality of what God has done for each one of us in, and through, the person of Jesus Christ; his death on the cross in our place, so that he might take onto himself the burden of all that we have done wrong; and his resurrection and reuniting with his Heavenly Father, so that we too can join in this same eternal renewal of relationship with God.

It’s through the Father’s extraordinary gift of grace, which flows out of His boundless love for us all; which cannot be earned or striven for; and to which we’re all called to respond, that we’re able to be united with Him in eternity.

But this grace is not merely that we might be united with God in eternity, but that we might know, and live in the power of His Kingdom in the here and the now. In the person of Jesus, his life, his miracles, his healings, all of his interactions with those around him, the Kingdom of God broke into the here and the now. In the person of the Holy Spirit, whom Christ left to be with us here on the earth, we too have the presence of the Kingdom amongst us; a presence with whom we have a choice to co-labour, or not.

Each one of us has this choice, as to whether we make a step into grace, or whether we choose a different pathway. Paul explains this to the Roman Christians in language that we will most likely find alien, if not downright difficult, today, perhaps especially when there is so much - utterly and completely rightly - emotion attached to slavery, the ‘example from [his] everyday life’ that Paul uses as his illustration.

At the time of Paul’s life, in the first century AD, it’s estimated that 35%-40% of the population of Italy was slaves, drawn from conquered nations in all parts of the Roman Empire. The entire Roman socio-economic fabric was based on these vast numbers of enslaved men, women and children. It was, as far as Paul and his contemporaries were concerned, a fact of life. Notably, however, there are indications in several parts of Paul’s letters, of the possibility for entirely different master/mistress-to-slave relationships from the norm, as a direct consequence of both individuals being fellow believers in the early church; brothers and sisters in Christ.

But if we can perhaps temporarily suspend our acute discomfort over this whole Roman system, Paul’s use of this metaphor to illustrate his point about sin and death on the one hand, and grace and life on the other, is incredibly helpful to us, especially in what it has to say to us about sin.

As I said last week, using the word, “sin”, can make some people in contemporary society extremely uncomfortable – it’s certainly a word to be used with great care. But basically it is the choice that we all-too-often make to turn away from the life that God, in Christ, has offered to us, and live less than whom we truly are.

This image of slavery Paul uses perfectly captures the potential that sin has to rule our lives, should we allow it in, even as people who’ve chosen to follow Jesus Christ in our lives. I know only too well just how often I find myself turning away from the path to which Christ calls me. I allow tiredness to get the better of me, and am short or rude to Clare or Esther. I get impatient with the pottering driver in front of me, and carve him up. I swear under my breath in Italian or Spanish since obviously God is hard of hearing and doesn’t understand foreign languages. What, I wonder, is your equivalent of these – because, being human, we all have them? And the more we do these things, the more – insidiously – they become the norm; the more they become habits; the more these habits are difficult to break; the more we become ‘enslaved’ to them.

But there is Good News! As Paul says, whilst the temptation is for each of us to be enslaved by this sin, which leads only to death, we’ve been set free from the power sin has over us by the infinitely loving, infinitely generous grace of God, in the person of Jesus.

In this sense, we are called, in Paul’s words, to become “enslaved to God”. But this is “slavery” in the sense that God is – as we will sing in our second hymn - our all-loving Master, whose name we are called to proclaim. We are to declare, as the earliest Christians did, “Jesus is Lord!”, in direct opposition to the cry “Caesar is Lord!” which all Roman citizens were forced to profess.

“Enslaved to God”, so to speak, we are set free from any power that sin may claim over us. And this acknowledgement of God as our Lord and Master paradoxically, of course, gives us infinitely more freedom than when we are apparently ‘free’ to do all that we like – but, in reality, enslaved to sin. As Paul writes to the Galatians (in chapter 5, verse 1, of that letter), “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free”; the freedom in which we so truly understand the astounding nature of what God has done for us in the person of Jesus, that we have no desire to go on sinning, even though the reality of God’s grace means that, in theory, we could.

As Jake and Rose so beautifully sang for us, “Take my life, and let it be, Consecrated, Lord, to Thee; Take my will, and make it Thine; It shall be no longer mine”. This is the paradox of the Christian life. As Jesus himself declares, “Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” Whoever truly places themselves under the Lordship of God, will find freedom in his service that can only ever be found there. This is God’s extraordinary gift of grace in Jesus Christ, a gift infinitely more precious than anything imaginable humanly by you or by me – better, even, than a magnificent fort, to a 7-year-old.

“The wages of sin is death.” That part, we understand all too well. “But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is the part we can never understand, only receive.

Lord, give us the wisdom and humility, we pray, to do just that. In Jesus’s name we pray, Amen.

**Intercessions
Led by Clare Chambers**

Psalm 24 says:
“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.”

God of creation, we thank you that you are sovereign over all that you have made; and not absent from creation, but powerfully in it. We humbly bring you our prayer for our leaders, the persecuted church, local community, and benefice.

God of all wisdom, we pray for the World Health Organisation, national governments, and our local leaders too. Since you have positioned these people in public service for this hour, we ask you to grant them insight and wisdom in leading the ongoing response to the Coronavirus, and strength beyond their own strength to sustain and guide institutions through this time of turmoil.

And, at a time of international and national societal unrest, we bring before you those whose job it is to exercise and administer justice. We ask you to grant them wisdom beyond their own wisdom, that they may use their power on behalf of the powerless, to reconcile, heal and make peace, that all may, in the words of Paul in his letter to Timothy, “lead a peaceful, quiet life, godly and dignified in every way”.

Lord, hear us.
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

God of all Comfort, we pray for the persecuted church.
We pray for our brothers and sisters across the globe, who are suffering because of what they believe. God of Comfort, we ask that you be with them right now, comfort and sustain them, give them courage and strength.

Lord, hear us.
**Lord, graciously hear us.**God of all comfort, we pray for our local communities:

Thank you God that you love all people. That every man, woman and child is precious in your sight.

We pray that you would, in your great love, draw close and bring comfort to those who as a result of the Coronavirus feel scared, isolated or afraid, and for those whose livelihoods are detrimentally affected by these uncertain times. In the quiet of our homes, we name to you now those we know in our community who are in need of your comfort.

We thank you for the actions of those who are seeking to support their neighbours, by practically delivering food and visiting the lonely. Would you protect and encourage them as they extend love to those in need.

We pray too for our local farming community, especially those who are struggling. Be with them as they deal with the financial impact of the current situation; may they and their families get the help and support they need. Help us in the wider community understand how best to support our farmers, valuing what they do to bring us food.

Lord, hear us.
**Lord, graciously hear us.**

God of all grace, we pray for our Benefice. We thank you for all the gifts you have given to us, personally and to the parishes in this benefice. Please help us to use them in your service and in the service of all people. May we be a welcoming and loving community, united in worship and open to your guiding Spirit.

We particularly pray for wisdom as we move towards having church services back in our churches. Would you guide our Church Wardens, PCCs, Benefice Council and Tim as they consider how this can be done safely and in a manner honouring to you and your purposes. Help us all to exercise good grace and understanding in the decision-making process; may our actions and words be pleasing to you.

Lord, hear us.
**Lord, graciously hear us.
Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

**The Collect for the Third Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to hear us; and grant that we, to whom thou hast given an hearty desire to pray, may by thy mighty aid be defended and comforted in all dangers and adversities; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
**Amen.**

**Ye Servants of God
Played by Deb Hubbard**

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
And publish abroad his wonderful name;
The name all-victorious of Jesus extol;
His kingdom is glorious and rules over all.

God ruleth on high, almighty to save;
And still he is nigh, his presence we have;
The great congregation his triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.

Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son;
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.

Then let us adore, and give him his right:
All glory and power, all wisdom and might,
All honour and blessing with angels above
And thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love.

Charles Wesley

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong
in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**