**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**July 12th – The 5th Sunday after Trinity**

**‘Free *For*’ (Romans 8:1-11)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope that this finds you well – it’s good to have some sun again!*

*In today’s sermon, I mention the diocesan ‘Real Life’ course which we will be helping to host in the Benefice from this autumn. Keep an eye out for more details, but at this stage, I’ll just encourage you to join us for great teaching and discussion about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, living your life for him and the Kingdom.*

*I also said last week that our Benefice Council and I are working on how and when to re-open our church buildings for public worship, as now permitted by Government and Church of England guidance. We’ve agreed to move cautiously, with some services resuming by the beginning of September at latest. But, to inform our decisions, we’ll send out to you soon a brief questionnaire about both how we’ve been able to minister to you to date during lockdown, and what your hopes and concerns might be about having services in church again. It would be great if, in due course, you could please complete this, and return it to us. Thank you so much in advance.*

*In the meantime, have a blessed week,*



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

**The Collect for The 5th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

Almighty God,
send down upon your Church
the riches of your Spirit,
and kindle in all who minister the gospel
your countless gifts of grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Breathe on me, Breath of God**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

Breathe on me, Breath of God
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure;
Until with thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine;
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God:
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch

**Bible Reading: Romans 8:1-11 (New International Version)**

**Read by Clare Chambers

*Life through the Spirit***

*1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

*5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.*

*9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

**Sermon: ‘Free *For*’ – Rev. Tim Chambers**
After last week’s brief interlude for Café Church and the parable of the Good Samaritan, we’re back again on our journey together through St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans. I’ve said previously how central the Book of Romans is to the stories of some towering figures in church history. And, within Romans, chapter 8 is one of the most loved - perhaps *the* most loved - chapter in the whole of the Bible.

Why might this be so?

When we turn to our passage, we’re immediately conscious of the fact that this chapter is just one part of the long and sometimes complex argument that St. Paul gives to help his Roman audience understand the basis for their faith in Jesus Christ, and the hope they have in him. “Therefore”, Paul starts – referring back to what he’s said in chapters 6 and 7 in particular. We looked at chapter 6 at the end of June – if you missed those services, do catch up with them on our YouTube page, of which details are on the Benefice website. There, St. Paul sets out that those who live “in Christ”, have died to sin and are no longer slaves to it.

And then in chapter 7 (which we skipped last week!), he goes on to explain how, in Christ, we’ve also died to our obligation to follow the law of Moses, given to God’s people in the Old Testament. But St. Paul also makes clear that the law of Moses is a holy and a good thing, because it reveals to us just how far we fall short of God’s design for our lives, and how much we need to be set free from our sinfulness, by God, through faith in Jesus Christ.

So, “therefore”. “Therefore” what?

“Therefore” Paul affirms, “There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus”. No condemnation! No wonder Romans 8 is one of the Bible’s most loved chapters! What an extraordinary declaration! For those who put their faith in Jesus Christ; who profess that he is lord over their life, and seek to follow him in everything; nothing more needs to be done. You are no longer condemned! It’s already ALL been done for us on the cross. As verse 2 continues, “Because *through* Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life, has set you free from the law of sin and death.”

We are saved *for* eternal life, *from* sin and death, *by* God’s grace, *in* the person of Jesus Christ, *through* the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

It’s almost as if, metaphorically speaking, we could pack up and go home now: Job done; thank you Jesus!

But that would be to miss the point.

Some of you may have heard of, or may even have watched, a series on the subscription TV service, Netflix, called Orange Is the New Black. To be honest, given that it’s set in a women’s prison, there’s some pretty choice language and disturbing scenes, but it also asks some really pertinent questions about justice and punishment and society.

Anyway, one of the main characters in the series is a woman called Taystee. And in one particular episode, Taystee’s just about to be released from the jail back into the community, after serving her time. Her friends in the prison are so pleased for her that she’s going to be free once again. They cheer her on as she heads off into the outside world.

And then a couple of episodes later, she’s back. And her friend corners her in the prison library, and asks her, “Why are you back? You got out. You were free. Why are you back in prison?” And Taystee says to her, “You don’t know what it’s like. They don’t tell you what it’s like on the outside. Nobody wants to give you a job because you have a record. And then when you finally get a job, it’s a minimum wage job, and you can barely afford to live. And all the people that I thought I knew, they weren’t where I thought they were. I didn’t have a place to stay; I didn’t have food to eat. All the people I know are either poor, or in prison, or gone. So at least here, I know the rules. At least here, I have food. At least here, I have a bed.” It’s a desperate scene, when you stop and think about what it’s like to face all of society’s judgment on you, when you’re trying to put your past behind you.

It’d be very easy for us to say, “Well, that’s just a TV show. Surely it can’t be that bad.” But if we look at rates of reoffending for those who have spent time in prison in the UK, 48% of adults will re-offend within one year of their release, and the majority of these will be put back into our prison system. We shouldn’t forget, of course, that we have HMP Whatton within our very own parishes, and that there are men in there who will face exactly these dilemmas, when they too are let out.

The main reason for this reoffending is that, when people are released back into society, they just have no support network. They have no way to make ends meet. The reality is that it’s simply not enough just to get *out* of prison. You can’t just focus on what you’re getting free *from*; you need to focus on what you’re getting free *for*. You have to have a re-envisioned hope. It’s not enough just to get pulled *out*; you have to get pulled *in* to something. And so often in our society, that ‘something’ just isn’t there.

I’ve shared these TV scenes and these statistics with you this morning because I think they echo so closely what Paul says in these verses. Because there is a prison - this prison of “sin and death”, as Paul describes it - which we are in. But there’s also *freedom* in Jesus Christ; the *true* freedom that is freedom from your sins.

On a spiritual level, this image of prison and freedom is *our* story. We’re constantly caught between this duality of the prison of sin and death, and the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus. And in fact, as Christians, our rate of recidivism - our rate of going back to jail - is not 48%; it’s 100%. Because every single one of us, every single day, falls back into that prison. Yes, we have freedom in Christ and we celebrate that grace, but then we turn right around, and we screw it all up. We get it wrong. We let people down. We let *God* down. It is our story too.

And this is why Paul keeps on coming back to his theme – grace and sin; freedom versus bondage. As Christians, we can find ourselves in constant frustration, that we want to live like Christ, but fail to live up to it. And every time we fail to live up to it, we end back up in that cell of guilt or shame. But Paul reminds us that Christ walked into our prison cell, and threw open the door. There is no condemnation in Christ Jesus! We are free!

But it’s not enough to be free *from*. We have to be free *for*. The Good News is that, unlike Taystee, who walked out of the prison and found herself alone, we are *not* alone. We’re not alone, because the Holy Spirit is with us. Not as some nagging parole officer, but as the Holy Spirit, encouraging; calling us on in the paths of Christ. The same Spirit who brought Christ back from the dead, has the power to bring, in our lives, life in the midst of death. We’re not just pulled *out* of sin, we’re pulled *into* life with God; the life of the *Kingdom* of God.

Even if you don’t have to shop from these particular shelves in the supermarket, I imagine all of you are familiar with the section that stocks food and drink for those who unfortunately have some form of allergy to a particular foodstuff. Very often the ranges stocked there seem to be branded, “Free From.”

Well, I have news for you this morning. In ‘the supermarket of life’, so to speak, as a Christian, your packaging doesn’t just say “Free *from*.” All over you, in bright, bold capitals, is written “Free *FOR*.” And that “Free *for*”, is what Paul declares in verse 6 of our passage this morning. In Christ, you are free *for* the life and peace that come through the presence of the Holy Spirit living in you.

We are set free for *life*; for life *with* the Spirit, and *in* the Spirit. And, in that, we’re called to *grow*, because that’s what living things do. We’re called to grow; to learn; to be a disciple of Christ. That’s exactly what ‘disciple’ means in its original Greek word, *mathetes*: someone who learns.

And so I’d like to finish this morning by commending to you all something that we’ll be running here in the Cranmer Group from September, in conjunction with our Diocese. It’s one evening a week; three weeks a term; over three terms, and it’s called Real Life. It’s a fantastic course, with which I’ve been involved before, that helps you understand what being a disciple of Jesus Christ looks like in practice. It helps you see the “Free for” that’s written on each one of you. It encourages you to explore the freedom that only life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit can give. And it enables you to grow, into the fullness of being the child of God, whom your Heavenly Father designed you to be. There’ll be more details about Real Life very soon; this morning all I want to do is plant a seed of interest in each one of you.

Because that’s precisely what each one of us is called to. To real life; to fullness of life; to the freedom of a life lived in and for our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In his holy and blessed name, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Patrick Newton**
Lord, settle our minds now as we reflect on Tim’s words. Help each of us to welcome the presence of the Spirit into our lives. Let us thank God for sending his only Son that we may be freed from the law. Give us the courage to ask ourselves the difficult questions – what is important to us, who dwells in us. Give us the courage to ask - how can we walk better in Christ.

Lord in Your Mercy,
**Hear our Prayer.**

Lord, We continue to live in unprecedented times in which our society is facing challenges never experienced before. Help us to put our faith in you that despite these worrying times, you hold each of us in your loving arms and treasure us. We pray that you guide and inspire our leaders to make wise decisions to protect us and yet also protect the livelihoods of as many of us as possible.

We pray for all in the NHS and Care Home workers that they may work safely and enjoy some respite from the trauma and demands of the last few months treating Covid patients and treading that fine line of protecting their own lives and those of their families. We pray for all essential workers who have kept our society going in these last few months.

We pray for those countries where Covid is hitting hard, such as USA, Brazil and India. You are a Lord of goodness, generosity and love; may these countries have the wise leadership and resources needed to care for their suffering people.

Lord in your mercy,
**Hear our prayer.**

Let us pray for our local churches and communities. We pray for the Cranmer Group of Parishes. We thank you for Tim, Clare and Esther and the fresh impetus they have given us in our walk in faith. Thank you for their energy, enthusiasm and their wonderful online services, and for the challenges of their tricky first three months that they have faced with faithful diligence. Lord we thank you for our Church Wardens, our Treasurers, our PCCs and all who guide the outreach of your churches in our community. We also pray for our schools in Aslockton and Orston, may your witness touch the children in these schools.

We pray that our parishes may grow in our awareness and caring for social issues in our community. We pray that as part of our walk in Christ we can recognise and speak out against social or racial injustice.

In particular at this time we pray for guidance for our church leaders as they deliberate on the best way of opening our churches up for services again. We all miss the community that we receive from attending services but thank you that we have been able to benefit from online services and meetings. We pray that a satisfactory solution can be reached so that we can worship you in our churches again when it is safe to do so.

Lord in Your Mercy,
**Hear our Prayer.**

Let us pray for Comfort and healing all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit. Let us pause for a moment to think of those we know who have passed away or are suffering at this time….

…Give them courage and hope in their troubles; and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord in Your Mercy,
**Hear our Prayer.**

Finally Lord we ask that you direct and guide our hearts and bodies over the coming week that we might live better, more fruitful lives following Christ.

All these things we pray in Jesus name,
**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 5th Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by thy governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Come Down, O Love Divine**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Come down, O Love divine!
Seek thou this soul of mine
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear,
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn
Till earthly passions turn
To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
And let your glorious light
Shine ever on my sight,
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity
Mine outward vesture be,
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;
True lowliness of heart,
Which takes the humbler part,
And o’er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong,
With which the soul will long,
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
Till we become the place
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Bianco da Siena, trans. R.F. Littledale

**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.**