

## Reflection for 2020-06-21 (Trinity 2)

Romans 6: 1-11

So, our reading today sounds a bit heavy, right? Death and sin and life! Paul does like to get heavy, especially in his letter to the Romans, but he's talking about stuff we all go through – indeed, about stuff we go through lots of times every day.

In the chapter just before what Carolyn read for us today, Paul was talking about how, as followers of Jesus, we don't live under the Law but under grace. The Law, Paul says, can only condemn and not save – law is all about what happens when you break it.

But Jesus's death bought us freedom from the law, Paul says. That means we don't have to worry about the law, or breaking it, any more. Where there's law-breaking, or sin, God sends grace. And, where there's more sin, there's more grace.

So, in today's reading, Paul feels the need to put a little caution in here. If more sin means more grace, should we actively go out and sin, so that there'll be more and more grace? Seems to make sense, right?

No, he says, don't be daft.

It's true, Paul says, that we were slaves to sin. We were bought and paid for, and served sin as a master. But – *but* – all contracts are cancelled when one party dies. Which means that, when we die, sin loses its hold over us. Although it's normally a bit late at that point!

Through Jesus, though, we are dead to sin. We've all heard the phrase "he's dead to me", right? Well, this is where that comes from. We're dead to sin.

Sin has no more power over us because we're dead to it. Sin's not our master, we're not helpless against it, and we have a new life in Jesus.

More than that, sin is, fundamentally, not something that should really concern us any more. We're dead to it. We don't need to think about it any more, don't need to give it our attention, because part of its power always came from our attention, from the way sin was centred in our heart and mind.

As followers of Jesus, we share in Christ's death on the cross. When Jesus died, so did we. Our old self died and we were born again.

Baptism is a symbol of many things but one, Paul says, is that it's a sign of our being buried with Christ. Remember, baptism in those days was usually done by immersing you in a river – you'd go right down into the cold and the dark, and be brought back up into the light and warmth of the world, to be welcomed into the Church's body.

If, then, we've become part of Jesus's death, how can sin have any hold on us? The contract by which it took ownership of us is dissolved, its power is broken. All we're left with is the habit, the fear, the choice.

So, we still sin, but God's grace is there to overcome. God's grace sets us right again. It gives us the strength to face those we've sinned against, to admit our fault and ask forgiveness. It gives us the strength to face the God who ultimately receives all our sins, and ask forgiveness as we did earlier in this service.

It even gives us the strength to face ourselves, to admit to ourselves that we have faults that hurt others. To root out the sin, to reform the habits. It's hard work, but God's grace is there if we will but lay hold of it.

Sin increases, even among Christians. Paul knew this. But, he says, grace increases all the more, so that grace might reign for eternity.

The Law can no longer condemn us if we follow Jesus's Way, because we have already died in Jesus. He shared everything with us: His love, His teaching, and even His death.

Paul talks about death here because we need to know that there's nothing to fear any more. We've already died in Jesus, so we need to look for the grace that comes next and let ourselves be open to it. That's the only way we'll see Jesus's promises coming true in our lives.

And, if we're not seeing Jesus's promises coming true, if we're *not* seeing the Kingdom coming, if we're *not* working towards that great feast day when the outcast and the refugee will sit at the head of the table while we serve them – *then* we know we're not fully letting God's grace work in us.

Because there's far more to this than sharing in death and overcoming sin. If we share in Christ's death, says Paul, then we also share in His *life*. And there are two key ways, for Paul, that this happens.

The first is that we'll share in Jesus's resurrection. Just as death had no hold on Jesus, so it will have no hold on us. After we finally die ourselves, we'll be raised to life again to die no more.

Elsewhere, Paul says that Christians should be pitied more than any other people if there's no resurrection. It's because all our hope is pinned on this – on the power that's shown in Jesus's resurrection, on the grace that flowed from the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, on the promise that the whole world can be made new.

This is the hope for future life and joy in the world to come. This is core to Jesus's Way.

But the second, and the more important, way that we share in Jesus's life is that we share it *now*. This isn't just about eternal life in some perfect future heavenly kingdom. This is about Christ-filled life in this damaged, hurting, God-breathed, beloved world around us.

Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Jesus Christ, says Paul. What should occupy our minds and hearts is not sin but God's Kingdom. We, who follow Jesus, should be *alive* to God!

Life is what we do now. Eternal life is what we do now. Risen life is what we do now.

Although Christians believe in life after death, we also believe in life *before* death. And Jesus said that we were to seek and build God's Kingdom *now*, that we are to follow His command to love our neighbour as we love ourself *now*.

Because we've died with Christ, sin has no hold on us *now*.

Because we live with Christ, we need not fear death *now*.

Because we've died with Christ and live in Christ, grace will abound in us *now*.

And, above all, because we are in Christ, we can face tomorrow secure in the knowledge that we are loved, we are supported, we have grace and strength to follow in Christ's Way.

Because Christ lives – and we live in Him, and He lives in us.