

**WE ARE SET FOR LIFE!**  
**Sermon for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent, 2020**  
**Romans 8:1-11**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, Romans 8:1-11: <sup>1</sup> **Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** <sup>2</sup> **For the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the principle of sin and death.** <sup>3</sup> **For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the sinful human nature, God has done, by sending His own Son to be like sinful human nature, to be a sin-offering. He has condemned sin in human nature,** <sup>4</sup> **that the just Requirements of the Law may be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the sinful human nature but according to the Spirit.** <sup>5</sup> **For those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on the things that belong to the sinful nature, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things that belong to the Spirit.** <sup>6</sup> **For the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is death, but the way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit is life and peace.** <sup>7</sup> **This is so, because the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is hostile to God. For it is not subordinate to God's Law. For indeed it cannot be.** <sup>8</sup> **Those who are in the sinful nature cannot please God.** <sup>9</sup> **You, however, are not in the sinful nature but in the Spirit, if God's Spirit dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ;** <sup>10</sup> **but, if Christ is in you, your bodies are dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.** <sup>11</sup> **If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

When someone wins big in the lotto, it is often said that he or she is "set for life." Such people have the opportunity to live a life of luxury, free of money problems and without a fear of the future, at least from a financial standpoint. It would be nice to not have to worry about money and to be able to do whatever you want.

But money or wealth is not everything. Whether we have been blessed with much or not, we are already rich, already set for life. We're set for life and then some. We're not set because we've won big or are healthy or happy or anything else, we're set because we are in Christ Jesus. We are set because we do not have to worry about anything, even about viruses getting around, causing anxiousness and so on, because we are safe in the care of Jesus, and *that* is true wealth.

Our text today is from Romans 8, but to really understand Romans 8 you have to hear part of Romans 7.

In Romans chapter seven Paul talks about how difficult our battles with sin can be, and he uses himself as an example. He says, "*For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out*" (7:18). As a Christian, Paul struggled with his sinful nature. He had sinful desires but knew they were wrong. He tried to avoid sin but inevitably failed. He went on to say, "*I see in my members another law waging war against the Law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" (v. 23-24). Paul saw the sin that was in him, the natural corruption that led him to act in sinful ways. He recognised all too well that the sins that accompanied the flesh were the sins we wrestle with every day and which make us the wretched sinners that we are.

"*Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*" Whenever we read these words, we ought to see ourselves. We delight in the Law of God, and we want to do God's will, but sin keeps getting in the way, spoiling our best efforts. It is terribly frustrating and makes us miserable. That is why we confess our sins, and this confession needs to be honest. If we don't recognise our sins and our failures, if we don't admit those things that put our salvation at risk, then we're being sinfully dishonest. We all have this battle going on inside, and it's one that'll continually plague us this side of heaven, but just because we have this battle going on inside of us, doesn't mean all is lost. To the contrary, according to Romans chapter eight, we are set for life.

Paul writes, "**Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**" Do you see why we are set for life? We're set because the condemnation we deserve because of our sins has been taken away. We're

wretched sinners who deserve condemnation and God's anger, and yet, despite all this, we're not condemned because, as Paul says, **"For the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the principle of sin and death."** A word Paul uses very frequently in Romans is the Greek word 'nomos.' Basically, it translates as "law," but, depending on context, there can be considerable variation in how it is used and what it means. Here, 'nomos' is translated twice as "**principle.**" It could easily also in this instance be translated as 'control.' Thus, through Christ Jesus the *control*, or rule, of the Holy Spirit, who gives life, has set us free from the *control* of sin that brings death. How does sin bring death? By invoking God's holy Law. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote, *"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Law"* (1 Corinthians 15:56); and earlier in this letter to the Romans he said, *"The wages of sin is death"* (6:23).

Now Paul says that we have been set free from the **principle** or *control* of sin that brings death. How did this change come about? Not through the Law, which sin calls upon to mete out the death penalty on sinners, but through the work of the Spirit of life, that is, the Holy Spirit, who brings people to faith in Christ and gives them life. You are forgiven and you are cleansed of your guilt because Christ has given you **the Spirit of life**, the Spirit who brings absolution and pardon. This absolution is yours because Christ has done for you what you couldn't do for yourself.

Paul goes on to say, **"For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the sinful human nature, God has done, by sending His own Son to be like sinful human nature, to be a sin-offering. He has condemned sin in human nature, so that the just requirements of the Law may be fulfilled in us..."** Did you catch what Paul says? He says that because we're sinful and unable to keep the Law, the things we do cannot bring us salvation. We'll never earn our way to heaven, and no one will enter heaven because he or she is a good person. It doesn't work that way. Instead, the Father has sent His Son to do what the Law couldn't do – that is, to save us. Jesus Christ took on our likeness and fulfilled the Law by doing what we can't. He kept every law that we break. He always kept His Father as number one. He never gossiped or said hurtful things. He never stole or lied or coveted. He never lusted or hated or mistreated someone He loved. He was perfect, and then, because He had done everything His Father had commanded, He was killed. He took our place under God's Law and was condemned for our sins. He died in our place and because He fulfilled the Law, we have now fulfilled it. He has given to us what we couldn't obtain on our own. His death has guaranteed that we're forgiven, and we have a new Spirit within us. So now we really understand what Paul meant when he said, **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** You're not condemned, you're set for life.

You are now set free so that your mind is set on the things of God. Paul writes, **"You, however, are not in the sinful nature, but in the Spirit, if God's Spirit dwells in you."** There is no doubt in Paul's mind that Christ is dwelling in the hearts of his readers through faith worked by the Holy Spirit. This is a really powerful verse and what it means is that you are different. Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, our thinking isn't focused on sin or the temptations of the flesh, it's focused on God.

As Christians we're different, that is why we suffer so much in the world today. There are the usual things that we don't see eye to eye with, with the world – such things like abortion and single-sex marriage. That is why when we speak up against such practices, we are often treated with contempt. There are many other worldly things in which we disagree with, or want to take no part of, and are scorned. The bottom line is that in any way in which we try to fit in with modern culture and its way of life, when it runs contrary to the Word of God, then we are embracing the spirit of the flesh. As Paul warns, **"For those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on the things that belong to the sinful nature; but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things that belong to the Spirit."** These two mind-sets are mutually exclusive. You cannot have a mind set on two different things, and it's especially true that whenever we set our mind on the things of the flesh or the world, our thoughts will always drift away from God. Christ has paid the price for our deliverance, He has given us life, and now, with God's help, we live as those who have a new Spirit - God's Holy Spirit.

So does this mean we never sin? Of course not. I wish it were true, but it's not, and we know that all too well. As Christians our minds are set on the things of God, but temptations swirl all around us, and we're going to succumb to them and we're going to sin. But, and this is the good news, because the Spirit of God dwells in us, we're not just sinners, we're also saints. That old axiom coined by Luther rings true: *Simul justus et peccator* – saints and sinners at the same time. We're sinners because we sin, but we're saints because we're forgiven and **there is now no**

**condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** Can you see a pattern? Because we're forgiven and not condemned for sins and because Christ has done what's necessary, sin has no dominion over us. It can't control us because we have the Spirit of God. And because we have this Spirit we have the power to resist temptation and to turn to God when we sin.

That is why we always talk of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. It's at the Altar of God that our Spirit is renewed, and our mind is prepared for the battles that lay ahead of us. It's in Baptism that we are given the power to tell that devil and the world that we do not belong to them, neither do we set our minds on them. As Luther once said, "*Sin remains in our flesh even until death and works without ceasing. But so long as we do not give our consent to it or desire to remain in it, sin is so overruled by our baptism that it does not condemn us and is not harmful to us. Rather it is daily being more and more destroyed in us until our death.*"<sup>1</sup> Baptism and the Lord's Supper are far more powerful than anything we'll encounter in this world and it's why Paul can say, "... **for the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is death; but the way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit is life and peace.**" Life and peace, two things we need so very badly, and two things that we'll never get from this world, the Law, our flesh, or our sin, but only from the Spirit of God. We're blessed with the faith to keep our minds set on the things of the Spirit and as Paul promises us, "**if Christ is in you, your bodies are dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**" That righteousness is yours because Christ has given you His righteousness. It's not just Christ's righteousness that's in you, there's something else, He is in you and you are in Him.

So, are you set for life? Absolutely! You're set for this life and the life to come because Christ is in you and He has not condemned you for your sins. Instead, He's given you life and peace. This is such wonderful news for all us wretched sinners. We fail, we sin, we succumb to temptation, and yet, God is there forgiving and renewing a right spirit within us - His Spirit, and that Spirit will be with you always, for as Paul says in the last verse of our text, "**If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you.**"

Eternal life is already a present reality, but until we leave this sin-stained world, we will always have our sinful nature, doing things contrary to God. One day we shall leave our sinful nature and our sins behind. He has given us life in this world, and He'll give us life in the next and, until He does, by His grace and power, He will let us keep our minds set on Him. Indeed, we are set for life, set for this life, and the next. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty and ever-living King of all creation, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, whom all the heavenly hosts praise and glorify, hear our prayer.

We thank You, heavenly Father, for Your limitless love in the gift of Christ Your Son, for the sacrifice of His life on the cross for us, for the promise of eternal life through His death and resurrection, and for the cleansing of our consciences from dead works by His obedience.

Increase our joy in Your rich blessings: the forgiveness of our sins, deliverance from death and the power of the devil, and the assurance of everlasting life, which Jesus' crucifixion have obtained for us.

We thank You that in Christ You have spoken to us the words of life. Inspire us to love and worship Him in spirit and in truth. Give us that faith that sees in Him the eternal Godhead, the everlasting I AM, the One who is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Grant that we may always trust in His mercy, be faithful to His Word, obey His commandments, and honour Him by losing our lives for His sake and for the Gospel's, as He lost His life to gain us.

In mercy, cleanse and strengthen Your Church, that it may be saved from all weakness and failure and be filled with power for holy service. Govern the nations on earth, that people everywhere may live in harmony with their fellowmen and serve one another's needs. Pour out Your grace on our homes and on all schools, that the young may be trained for a useful life on earth, and be made ready for the life to come. Bless all who work honestly with mind and hand to provide those things we need for this life. Give all people everywhere joy in doing their daily work, and grant that they may do it as those who are accountable to You.

<sup>1</sup> *Luther's Works, Word and Sacrament I*. Fortress Press, Philadelphia. Page 35.

Gracious Heavenly Father, Creator and Preserver of all things, we come before Your throne of grace on behalf of our families and friends, ourselves and all in our world who feel the fear of contracting the latest outbreak of a coronavirus. Strengthen our bodies and spirits, that we may be spared this sickness. Give wisdom and knowledge to doctors, nurses and all who provide care for the sick and suffering as well as to our world's leaders who bear responsibility for their citizens. If it is Your will, heal those who are suffering from infection and bring the spread of this virus to a swift end. Throughout all days of trial, remind us of Your great love and the forgiveness and salvation earned for us by Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, without You, all things soon wither and die. We thank You for the rain you sent so the crops could be planted. Continue to send us favourable weather so that our farmers can faithfully continue their task of feeding the world.

Help us to use our abilities and possessions faithfully, for everything belongs to You. Forgive us for being selfish and for misusing our gifts. Comfort the suffering, the deprived, the burdened, and the aged. Be the help of the needy, the protector of the helpless, and the Saviour of all people. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen.

## FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Ezekiel 37:1-14

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD came on me. He brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and put me down in the middle of the valley. It was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He kept leading me past them and all around them. I saw very many of them on the surface of the valley and saw that they were very dry. <sup>3</sup> Then He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones return to life?"

I answered, "Lord GOD, You Yourself know."

<sup>4</sup> Then He told me: "Prophecy over these bones and tell them, 'Dry bones, listen to the Word of the LORD!' <sup>5</sup>This is what the Lord GOD has said to these bones: "Look! I shall cause breath to enter you, and you will live. <sup>6</sup> I shall put tendons on you, make flesh come on you and cover you with skin. I shall put breath in you, and you will return to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'""

<sup>7</sup> So, I kept prophesying as I had been commanded. While I was prophesying, there was a noise and suddenly a rattling sound, and the bones came closer together, one bone attaching itself to another. <sup>8</sup> While I kept looking, I saw that there were tendons on them, flesh grew on them, and skin covered them over. However, there was no breath in them.

<sup>9</sup> Then He told me: "Prophecy to the breath! Prophecy, son of man, and tell the breath, 'This is what the Lord GOD has said: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain people, that they may return to life.'""

<sup>10</sup> So, I kept prophesying, as He had commanded me, and breath entered them. They returned to life and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly large army.

<sup>11</sup> Then He told me: "Son of man, these bones are the whole family of Israel. Look! They are saying, 'Our bones are dry, and our hope is being lost. We have

been completely cut off.' <sup>12</sup> Therefore, prophesy and tell them, 'This is what the Lord GOD has said: "Look, My people! I shall open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. I shall bring you to the land of Israel. <sup>13</sup> Then, My people, you will know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up out of your graves. <sup>14</sup> I shall put My Spirit in you; you will live, and I shall settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD. I have spoken and shall carry it out," declares the LORD.'"

Romans 8:1-11

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the principle of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For what the Law could not do, because it was weak through the sinful human nature, God has done, by sending His own Son to be like sinful human nature, to be a sin-offering. He has condemned sin in human nature, <sup>4</sup> that the just Requirements of the Law may be fulfilled in us, who do not live according to the sinful human nature but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the sinful nature set their minds on the things that belong to the sinful nature, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things that belong to the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is death, but the way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> This is so, because the way of thinking that belongs to the sinful nature is hostile to God. For it is not subordinate to God's Law. For indeed it cannot be.

<sup>8</sup> Those who are in the sinful nature cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup> You, however, are not in the sinful nature but in the Spirit, if God's Spirit dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ; <sup>10</sup> but, if Christ is in you, your bodies are dead because

of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup> If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is dwelling in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you.

John 11:1-45

<sup>1</sup> A man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. <sup>2</sup> Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped His feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, his sisters sent someone to tell Jesus, "Lord, look! The one whom You love is sick."

<sup>4</sup> When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness will not end in death but is for the sake of the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

<sup>5</sup> Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus. <sup>6</sup> Yet, when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed in the place where He was for two more days. <sup>7</sup> After that, He told His disciples, "Let us go to Judea again!"

<sup>8</sup> The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, recently the Jews were trying to stone You. So, are You going back there?"

<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in a day? If anyone walks during the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. <sup>10</sup> However, if anyone walks during the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him."

<sup>11</sup> After He said this, He told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may wake him up."

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, His disciples said to Him, "Lord, if he has gone asleep, he will be restored to health."

<sup>13</sup> However, Jesus had meant that he was dead, but His disciples thought He meant that Lazarus was taking rest in sleep. <sup>14</sup> Therefore, Jesus then told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, <sup>15</sup> and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. However, let us go to him!"

<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Thomas, who was called "The Twin," said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him!"

<sup>17</sup> When Jesus arrived, He found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. <sup>18</sup> Bethany was near Jerusalem, about three kilometres away. <sup>19</sup> Many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them about their brother. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet Him, while Mary kept sitting in the house. <sup>21</sup> Martha told

Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. <sup>22</sup> However, even now I know that God will give You whatever You ask from God."

<sup>23</sup> Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

<sup>24</sup> Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus told her, "I am the Resurrection and the Life. The person who believes in Me will live even if he dies, <sup>26</sup> and everyone who lives and believes in Me will assuredly never die. Do you believe this?"

<sup>27</sup> She told Him, "Yes, Lord, I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

<sup>28</sup> After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary. She told her in private, "The Teacher is here and is asking for you."

<sup>29</sup> When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him. <sup>30</sup> Jesus had not yet come into the village but was still at the place where Martha had met Him. <sup>31</sup> Then the Jews who had been in the house with Mary and had been comforting her saw her get up quickly and leave. They followed her, thinking that she was going to the tomb, to weep there. <sup>32</sup> So, when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet. She said to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews weeping who had come with her, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled.

<sup>34</sup> He asked, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see!"

<sup>35</sup> Jesus wept. <sup>36</sup> Therefore, the Jews said, "See how He loved him!"

<sup>37</sup> However, some of them asked, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, also have kept this man from dying?"

<sup>38</sup> Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone had been laid against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, "Move the stone away!"

Martha, the dead man's sister, told Him, "Lord, he smells already. He has been dead for four days."

<sup>40</sup> Jesus asked her, "Did I not tell you, 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God'?"

<sup>41</sup> So, they moved the stone away. Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. <sup>42</sup> I know that You always hear Me but have spoken because of the crowd that is standing around Me, that they may believe that You have sent Me."

<sup>43</sup> After Jesus had said this, He called out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out here!”

<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, with his feet and hands tied up with bandages and with his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus told them, “Unwrap him and let him go!”

<sup>45</sup> Therefore, many of the Jews who had come to Mary and who had seen what Jesus did began to believe in Him.