

Rappahannock Christian Church – 7/3/11

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Communion Meditation

Sometimes I can't decide if this communion meal should be somber, quiet and sorrowful because we are remembering that it was our sins that drove Christ to the cross and I think about the suffering and pain that He endured, or if we should have a happy celebration because Jesus saves us and gives us eternal life. Bring on the fireworks! It's a Victory Feast!

In truth, I'm convinced that it's both. All of these emotions and more come together here. The sorrow and the pain *are* represented in these Elements ... *BUT* His broken body and the shed blood are *FOR US!!!* We are so fortunate! In Him we are free and we are blessed!

Let me read to you from the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Human Nature

Romans 7:14-25 – We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

So here we are on Independence Day weekend. It's a holiday, with fireworks displays, concerts, hamburgers and hot dogs on the grill. We remember the brave heroes who won our freedom. We are no longer helpless against British oppression. We are free citizens of Untied States of America!

We who are Christians and spiritually minded know that oppression can take many forms. Yes, oppressive laws can keep a population down; people can be put in prison or shot at. But oppression can also be spiritual. Do you remember the discussion that Jesus had with the religious leaders of His day? "The Truth," He said, "will set you free." They, thinking only in physical and earthly terms, objected, saying that they were not slaves and didn't need to be set free. "Anyone who sins," He said, "is a slave of sin."

The Apostle Paul says something similar, though in a more positive way, when he says about the freedom that we have in Christ, "Sin will no longer be your master."

I believe that what Paul is doing in Romans 7 is going back and rehearsing what it was like for him as a Jew under the law. He tells his readers about the oppression that he felt at that time. In the early chapters of Romans he has described our plight under sin. Without Christ we are helpless. We are born with a sinful nature and there's no escape apart from God's grace.

In chapter 7 he illustrates this from his own experience. He was a Pharisee. In fact, Paul wasn't just a Pharisee; he was a really good Pharisee! He was a rising star within the Jewish religious establishment. Yet, in his heart of hearts he knew that he did not measure up to God's standard. He knew that no matter how many of God's laws he obeyed, there were still laws that he had broken. He was a sinner, and that separated him from the holy God.

He saw God's Law, and knew that there was nothing wrong with it. In fact, it was a good and wonderful gift from God. He wanted to keep it, wanted to please God. This is important for us to remember. We're not talking about some hardened criminal, guilty of rape and murder. Paul was a religious man. But his honest conclusion was that he was simply unable to avoid sin. The sinful nature we are born with makes us disposed to sin. We are naturally selfish, not godly. It's our nature to try to get things for ourselves, not to be altruistic and godly and good.

Wouldn't it be great if we had to sit our kids down and say, "Now, I know it will be difficult, but if you try really hard I'm sure you could be selfish, or lie, or be disobedient once in a while!" Of course, we don't have to do that. Quite the opposite. We have to teach and train our kids to do what is UN-selfish and to be obedient. Not that we're all disobedient and selfish all the time. The point is that we are all sinners. It is inevitable. We can't help it. We may wish that we could always and perfectly love God, and we may wish that we could always and perfectly love our neighbor. But we can't do it. We are held hostage by our sinful nature.

Listen to Paul express the frustration and defeat that he experienced again and again before Christ found him and saved him:

"For in my inner being I delight in God's law, but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a

prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

This is not the cry of a person who has been saved by Christ and has been "Set free from the law of sin and death." (Rm 8:2) It is the voice of one who has been trying to resist and defeat sin by himself. He wanted to be saved from sin's death-grip!

Paul says that Jesus Christ is the One who delivers and sets people free. He is the only one who lived a perfect, sinless life. He died in our place, providing atonement for our sins. And now, through faith in him, his perfect righteousness is credited to us. Sin's power over us is broken, and we are set free!

The old sinful nature never goes away, of course, until we die. But now, because Christ's Spirit lives in us, it is possible for us to overcome temptation. We are not helpless slaves to sin anymore. We can choose to obey God and live the life that God desires.

This is Independence Day. We are thinking about subjugation and freedom. Look at what has been happening in the Middle East over the last 6 months -- the so-called "Arab Spring." People have been taking to the streets, demanding freedom, an end to oppression by corrupt and cruel men. They have seen free people in the West. The possibility of freedom cannot be hidden from them anymore! They are longing for a taste of that freedom! I think it was like that for Paul before he found Christ. He was subjugated by a tyrant and he could not get free.

Now he is free. Now WE are free!
Send up the Fireworks!
Praise God for His unfathomable gift!

Benediction

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen. – Ephesians 3:20-21