

Romans 8:1-11 “Freed”

In 1963, that is 63 years ago, Martin Luther King delivered his famous, **“I Have a Dream”** speech. At the very end, he quotes an old African American spiritual and states that he hopes the time will come when everyone—regardless of their race, creed or nationality—will be able to say, **“Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty I’m free at last.”**

The apostle Paul was nowhere near as eloquent as Dr. King, **but Paul is expressing the same thought in Romans chapter 8 when he states, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”** Paul could have just as easily said, **“Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we’re free at last.”**

Martin Luther King spoke of freedom from the chains of bigotry and inequality. The apostle Paul spoke of a different freedom when he wrote about being **free in Christ**. In chapter eight of Romans, Paul discusses what he means when he says that we are free, and how we experience that freedom in our daily lives.

In chapter 6, Paul **told his readers that they were free from the old life—a life that was dominated by sin—an uncontrollable spirit of rebellion against God. Our baptism, as Christians, has opened a new life for us—some would say that we have been “born again,” or “born from above.” We have been freed FROM sin, and freed FOR a new life and a new relationship with God.**

In chapter 7, Paul told his readers that we were free from the frustration of thinking that we always needed to do a little bit more in order to be pleasing to God. **The cross of Jesus Christ has set us free from a life of “works righteousness,”—of always trying a little bit harder. We have been set free FROM works, and set free FOR a lifetime of experiencing God’s steadfast love, overwhelming grace, and unconditional forgiveness.**

Today Paul writes and tells his readers that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. No longer do we need to concern ourselves with our eternal destiny and with our relationship with God. **All of that is a done deal, which has been taken care of by Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. We have been set free FROM a life in the flesh, and set free FOR a life in the Spirit.**

We Christians talk about being free, but how free do you feel? We say that Jesus lived, died and rose again so that we could have life and have it abundantly. Do you believe that you are living the abundantly life? Life as a Christian is supposed to be different than a life lived without Jesus. Is your life that much different from your friends, neighbors and co-workers?

Though we are free, at times we feel that we are stuck in our past life—the life of the flesh and the life of sin and death.

In verse 6 Paul writes, **“To set the mind on the flesh is death.”** If we focus on the limitations or health struggles that we may have very long we start to be pulled into a pity party of hopelessness and despair.

Not finding enough misery in our own lives we begin to look around us at other people’s lives and get dragged into their frustration and misery. But Paul has a way out of our dilemma; a way to experience life in the Spirit.

Paul’s suggestion is to quit thinking about things of the flesh. In a sense, he’s telling us to get our minds out of the gutter. Instead he invites us to, **“Set our mind on the Spirit.”**

When we first read this, it doesn’t seem realistic. Our financial problems, relationship struggles, health issues, or even world events and unrest makes it difficult to change our focus from us to the Spirit. But Paul is clear that if we don’t change our focus, if we don’t try, nothing will change in our lives. I want you right now to take a moment and focus on what is really bothering you right now. What is draining the life the joy of living our your Christ center life of hope and forgiveness out of you? **Now, imagine yourself handing it over to Jesus so that he can take care of it. Take a few moments to look at Jesus and see his love and care for you.**

There are many reasons why for thousands of years humans have considered worship important. The Christian Church as always stressed the need for worship. One of the reasons we worship is to redirect our attention. We stop for a moment and focus on God—life of the Spirit, rather than this world and the life in the flesh. Worship is your opportunity to slow down, stop and refocus and renew your spirit. Worship is your earthly duty to almighty God. That is what he wants, our worship and praise. Worship begins before you even leave your homes as you turn your focus from your daily lives, struggles and frustrations towards worship. Your heart and your life need to regroup and refocus and what God is and can do in your life. Church is not just

another social organization like so many other places. Having a weekly practice of worship is a major tool to get yourselves more focused on the things of the Spirit.

Personal devotion is another spiritual discipline that enables us to turn our attention to things of the Spirit. It isn't a cure all, but it does help us remember where our help is to come from. Trinity even gives you devotional material in the Portals or Prayer, but that is one resource for you to utilize. Our readings on Sunday the OT, NT and Gospel are provided for you to read over again through the week. The readings are not just one and done on Sunday morning, but can be reread throughout the week as part of your spiritual discipline.

Is there really a new life in Christ? Are we able to experience an abundant life? Are the lives of Christians really different from those who do not know Jesus as their Lord and Savior?

Paul answers with a resounding, "Yes!" ***But living this new, abundant life is not a passive endeavor. It does include making the decision to change the focus of our thinking from the flesh to the Spirit.***

We don't need to run off to a monastery in order to live a life in the Spirit, nor do we need to just "get away from it all." Life in the Spirit is a life lived in the reality that Jesus is with us, we are in his care, and nothing can separate us from his love.

Amen