

## Freedom from the Law

Romans 7:1–13 Pentecost 4a 7-2-17

Jesus said, “the Truth will set you free”. Knowing what the Law is, what it does and can’t do frees us from anxiety, pride, and frustration.

In two commercials Life Lock, the identity protection company, illustrates the difference between a monitor that says you have a problem and someone who actually fixes the problem. We see an everyday example of a monitor when we look at the mirror each morning and see hair that needs combing, and a face in need of a shave or make up. Later we might also see a shirt too wrinkled or stained to leave the house.

But like an identity monitor, the mirror fixes nothing. Mine has never yet combed my hair or shaved my face. It would be silly to think it could. It is just a monitor.

Paul tells the truth about God’s Law. It also fixes nothing. It is a monitor that mirrors our true self and reveals that we have a problem. By contrasting our thoughts and actions to the standards of God, it exposes us as the sinners we are.

And it is brutally truthful. We tend to live in the fantasy that by what we do we are worthy of God’s love. But the law says, “You shall not covet”. Jesus, whom some falsely think as more lenient on the law, equated lust to adultery and hatred to murder. The truth that even our thoughts count as sin doesn’t even come up on most people’s radars.

Now when we hear the law of God we can respond in one of three ways, of which only one does any good. The first is what we see in our city’s streets when the government decides to enforce existing laws. People respond with rage and violence. We shake our heads, but these protestors illustrate what our own sinful nature wants to do on some level. When we hear the law, we rebel. Not even God has the right to tell us what we can do with our body, time, money, or whatever.

But that does not hold true for Christians. Paul writes that we are not our own, we were bought with a price. So we glorify God with our body, time, money, and whatever. That price was the blood of Jesus that atones for our rebellious violations of God’s law.

The second response to seeing our sin in the mirror of the law is to think, “I better, fix that. I can and I will.” Makes sense. After all don’t we use the same mirror each morning to fix that hair, shave that stubble and apply that make up? That works, until the next day, when the mirror shows that we need fixing again. Not only doesn’t the mirror fix us, it doesn’t help us fix ourselves permanently. So it is not true that by obeying the law we can fix ourselves up enough to be worthy of God’s love.

The third and only good response to the Law that gives life and freedom is to die to it. How do we get free from the law that condemns us because we can’t keep it? What is it that removes the frustration that spurs us to rebel and the despair that sets in when we fail again to do what is right? That freedom happens in the death that brings life.

It happens in our baptism. But it’s just water, isn’t it? Oh, it is so much more. It is water that God uses with the promises of His Word to give to each of us personally what Christ did for us on Good Friday and Easter. Paul says it well in the previous chapter:

Rom 6:3-4.

***<sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.***

And how do we walk in newness of life? In daily repentance. In confessing our sins to God we are liberated from the frustration not being able to live fully up to God’s standards. In daily repentance we remember and accept again the washing of rebirth and regeneration that Baptism gives. Though we are baptized once, because it is God’s perfect act upon us, it’s power to cleanse the conscience abides as long as we live in this sinful flesh.

We look in the mirror each morning. Our hair is still a mess, the makeup is gone. The stubble feels like sandpaper. We are a sight and in need of much fixing. But then we look into God’s Word and see the reflection not of ourselves, but of Jesus, whom Luther called the “mirror of the Father’s heart.” He is the truth about the law--the only one who could and did keep it, for us; the only One worthy to pay for our sins; the only One whose Truth has set us free from the law. Amen.