

Heart Transplant

[Romans 7:15-25a](#)

[Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

Our second reading this morning is from Paul's Letter to the Romans. Romans is often considered the most systematic statement of Paul's theology. In most of his other letters Paul is responding at least in part to particular problems in the church to which he writes. But in Romans, he seems to be trying to express his deepest understandings of the gospel.

Today's passage is a difficult one because it is taken out of its context. It sounds as though Paul is saying that even after his baptism and his growth in Christ he is still mired in the sin matrix.

Yet, in the previous chapter, Paul told us that through our baptism we have been transferred from the reign of sin to the reign of Christ. He said that our old self has been crucified with Christ and that we are also raised with him. So the key to this section where Paul talks about the disparity between what he wants to do and what he does, must be that very last question, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" and the reply, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

God is the one who rescues us. God is the one who makes us new. We are freed from the legalism of the old laws and made new and free in the service of the one who calls us. We no longer have to be "good" in order to be reconciled with God, so we can let go that whole burden of guilt and rejoice in the unconditional love of God. The Jewish way was primarily about doing the right thing according to the law, but the new covenant is that in Christ we don't have to worry about the right thing, we are free to love God and do what we like.

Because it is God who has made us ok, not the law.

But that doesn't mean that because of God's love and grace we are to go on sinning. We are freed from sin to love God and do what we like, which is to serve the one whom we love.

The relationship between us and God can now be one of unobstructed love. Instead of laws written on stone, we have the law of love written in our hearts. There is a wonderful prophecy in Ezekiel which we hear each year as part of the Easter Vigil,

"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh." (Ez.36:26) and also in Jeremiah (Jer.31:33),

"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The law is no longer an external thing to which we have to keep referring in order to make sure we're doing it right, but it is internal – it is in the relationship of love between us and God. It is in our hearts.

And I think this is where Jesus is going with his invitation, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

These are familiar and comforting words. Come to Jesus and find rest for your soul. As Augustine said, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”

Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me”. What we may miss here is that Jesus is highlighting the importance of instruction. Though we think of the yoke as equipment for an animal, the term was often used in rabbinic literature to refer to the task of obedience to the Torah¹ which depended on knowledge of the Torah. Jesus calls those who are burdened to learn from him.

Jesus calls us to learn from him so that we can live in the freedom which is given to us by God’s grace.

We need do nothing to earn God’s love. We need do nothing to be OK. That is the free and amazing gift of God’s love.

Our response to God’s love is to actively choose the new relationship with God, the relationship which will challenge us and change us and make us new. That is freedom because it is the life for which we were created and so it is the freedom to be our best selves.

We get to choose and accept the heart transplant that Ezekiel and Jeremiah talked about. We get to choose and accept a way of being where the life we lead is guided and directed by the connection between our hearts and God’s heart.

From God’s side it’s a done deal... but for us it’s not a done deal because we still have free will.

My friends, we can choose to continue in our habitual ways. We can choose to be anxious and fearful thinking that God’s love is not really enough for us. We can choose to continue paths of addiction to mood-altering substances or to activities like shopping or exercising. We can choose to lead self-centered or unbalanced lives.

And at times it may seem like those are not choices. It may seem that as Paul describes, the more we try and long to love God and our neighbor as ourselves, the more difficult it becomes.

But here’s the astonishing and wonderful good news. God created us and God loves us. Jesus the Christ died and was resurrected so that we might be freed from sin and freed from fear. We have been made one with that amazing grace through our baptism and through our conscious choice. And we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to make us holy.

¹ Thanks to Jennifer T. Kaalund for this reference: Dennis C. Duling, “Matthew” in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (eds. Harold W. Attridge, et al.; New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 1687.

We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

And the Holy Spirit is right here with us.

Jesus said. "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

It is the Holy Spirit who reveals the Creator and the Christ to us.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to take on Christ's yoke and to learn from Jesus.

It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the courage to take the heart transplant, to let go of the guilt and to live in the freedom of God's love.

it is the Holy Spirit who shows us the things we need to change, the places we need to grow in order to be closer to God, in order to be the people we were created to be, walking freely with our God, loving and forgiving, creating the reign of God right here, right now.

It is the Holy Spirit who enables us again and again to say with Paul, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"