

## Trinity Sunday

**Sermon Text:** Romans 8:12-17

**Theme:** “*Heirs of the Father*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Today’s reading from Romans teaches us that we are heirs of the Father. But the route to becoming heirs is not always smooth sailing. For anyone to realise their inheritance implies that a death is involved.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

### **We owe – big time**

Paul begins this section of his letter with the revelation that we are debtors – we are indebted to someone or something else. In these times of economic uncertainty we are learning again that being in debt to others is not a good thing. The phrase ‘good debt’ is starting to sound a little hollow as investments that were thought of being ‘rock solid’ are now worth much less than they were only twelve months ago. Many people who borrowed heavily to buy stocks or property have woken up to the realisation that many of their assets are worth less than what they paid for them. Whenever there is a debt, it always needs to be repaid.

So debt comes at a cost and it is easy to understand this cost when we think of assets. But what about spiritual debts? How do we measure these debts and to whom do we have to pay back? It may be painful, but it is worthwhile consider what you owe? Consider this carefully because whatever or whoever you owe will become your master. If the debt must be repaid, you will be working hard to pay it off until the debt is cancelled in full.

The bad news for us is that it is easy to be a debtor to things of the flesh and this is because it is our sinful nature that turns towards the things of this world rather than submitting to the will of our Heavenly Father. The news gets worse because becoming enslaved to our flesh will never save us. No matter how hard we try to fix things up for ourselves, we will always end up in a dead end. The Lord alone knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish (Ps 1:6).

Let’s consider some of the sins which enslave people in this day and age. Your favourite sin might be vanity in which case you owe it to your master to look after yourself before considering other people. Your energy will go into maintaining your personal appearance, providing for your entertainment, always aimed at keeping yourself ahead of others. The enslavement comes when you believe that unless you maintain a façade of having everything looking ‘just right’, you are somehow unworthy to take your place among your church friends, your colleagues, or even your own family. Not only is this bad for our personal relationships, such vanity will separate us from the love of God as we spend time trying to create our own image rather than trusting in that you have already been made in the image of God.

What about if your sin was that of pride? In this case, you would owe it to your master not to ever admit that you were wrong. Or if you were wrong, it would be important to invent reasons or people to blame other than yourself. Slavery to the sin of pride is often lonely because in the end, no one likes to be in the presence of those who refuse to believe they can make mistakes. And if you can’t admit that you *have* made mistakes, then you have no need for confession which means you have no need for God’s absolution which comes through his Word and Sacraments. Sinful pride hardens your heart to the blessings God wants to give to you.

Maybe your sin might be lust. If this were the case, you would be compelled to indulge in whatever vice you are enslaved to. Whether you lust after carnal, chemical, material things or otherwise, you will be willing to sacrifice your reputation, clean conscience, honour, and/or integrity to serve your master. That’s a big debt to pay to a master that promises so much but will only demand more and more of you until you are completely ruined. The newspapers are full of stories of high profile people who have had their reputations destroyed because of their slavery to the sin of lust.

Any of these sins might be your master, or there could be many others. If you wanted to ‘test’ yourself, you could run through a list of sins which might be your master and ask yourself whether these sins fill your mind or whether your mind is filled with the things of God. Do you read and meditate on God’s Word as a wonderful gift he has given to you as part of his mighty armour that will defend you from the temptations of the evil one, or do you complain that its boring and you’d rather read something else? Whichever you prefer, that will be your master. I pray that by the grace of God, your self-examination will lead you as you make your confession.

## **We are indebted to Jesus**

So our human nature draws us into a debt of the flesh and were this the end of the story, we would need to save ourselves. We would need to come up with our own solution which we could work out through our own fleshly endeavours. But as Paul writes in our reading, we are debtors *not* to the flesh. As Christian people we are not ruled any more by our flesh. You are God's child, created by him, made in his image. And it is for this reason God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to die in your place.

Through Jesus' death you have been saved from sin, death, and hell. Jesus has given you forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. All this was given to you in your baptism and Jesus still comes to you and gives it to you in His Word and in His Supper. Clearly we are indebted to God – we own him our lives.

Given that we now owe Jesus, what does he demand from us? Nothing, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9). Jesus dying in your place is a grace gift that he gives to you so you may now live, free from slavery to the sins of the flesh.

Shouldn't we do good works to show that we are thankful, or as evidence that we have really been saved? No. Sure we should be thankful that we have been rescued from certain death, but this is not our motivation for doing good things. If we do things to show we are grateful, we are trying to 'pay God back' for the good thing he has done for us. As forgiven Christians, we don't 'pay God back', we 'pay God's love forward'! We might do exactly the same things but instead of doing them because we have to, we do them because we are free from the curse of slavery to the false idols of our flesh.

## **Called to be a son of God**

Having the price for your sins paid by Jesus you are now called sons of God. Having freed you from slavery to sin, God doesn't want to be a slavedriver or a tyrant. So instead of calling you his slave, he calls you his son. Through Holy Baptism God adopted you as his own child into his heavenly family; and by the power of the Holy Spirit you come to him in prayer like a child crying out, "Daddy, daddy." This is the extent of God's love for you. Having saved you, he doesn't want you to be grovelling to him, fawning over him with your pious efforts of gratitude. God doesn't call you a slave who owes him big time for Jesus' death on the cross. He loves you and so he calls you his son.

To some it might sound odd that both men and women, boys and girls would all be called 'sons' of God. It might sound as though this is another example of the Bible being written by men with little or no thought to women. But Paul is using the term 'sons' in a legal sense, for it was the sons who stood to inherit that which belonged to their father. The daughters were married into other families. So if you are a woman, God doesn't say to you, "For all eternity, I'm sending you off to another family." He says, "Heaven is for *all people* who trust in my grace and forgiveness for in my kingdom there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). Friends, whatever your background, whatever your gender, rejoice to be a son of God, one of his heirs.

## **Called to be one of God's heirs**

That's the third thing Paul calls you in this text – an heir of God. Jesus didn't win salvation for a few privileged sons of God but for all people. This means God's kingdom is yours forever and the Holy Spirit is your witness to this every time he delivers forgiveness to you for Jesus' sake. Every gift of forgiveness renews your heavenly inheritance.

You are not a debtor to the flesh, you're a debtor to God, but he has already paid the cost in full. This means you are son of God and an heir to the kingdom of heaven. Now here's a warning, the devil, the world and *your* sinful flesh won't sit idly by as you soak up this good news. Each and every day they will tempt you with all those fleshly masters who will try to enslave you once more. And as you refuse to succumb to these temptations, you should expect to suffer for it. The devil will do his best to attack you since he can no longer defeat Jesus who is your new master.

Your new master is Jesus and he has conquered your enemies by his death and resurrection. God doesn't call you a slave, but a son, and if you are a son, you are his heir.

And may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.