

## ELCG Devotional Activity

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost•

Week of 28 June 2020

### We Are On the Way...

#### Scripture:

*“Thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness... Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:17-18, 22)*

*“It is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” (Phil 2:13)*

“Loving Spirit, let your wisdom guide what we think and do.  
Make us willing and responsive as you make all things new.”  
“Njoo Kwetu” (Tanzania)

These words - which we sang during Sunday’s worship - express our desire for the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts and actions in ways that reflect our new life in Christ. In their simplicity and beauty, they help us understand what is meant by “sanctification.” To sanctify is to “set apart” or “to make holy.” The Christian life is intended to be one of growth, of becoming more and more Christ-like. Sanctification is the process of growing in holiness in thoughts, attitudes, and actions.

**This week’s devotional invites us to reflect upon the significance of God’s sanctifying grace in our lives.**

#### Reflection:

The recent waves of protests against racial injustice and police brutality have brought a heightened awareness to the pervasiveness of systemic racism in the US and countries around the globe. The calls for meaningful change are seeking to right the wrongs that have been rooted in the evils of slavery over three centuries ago.

Within our current cultural context, the apostle Paul’s reference to slavery may be a stumbling block for our understanding the significance of this text – though it need not be. The relationship between a slave and the master had a different connotation in the first century

• *We are now in “Ordinary Time,” the season of the liturgical year which follows Pentecost and is marked by the color green. The term “ordinary” does not mean mundane or routine, but instead it refers to measured time. During this extended season, our focus turns to spiritual growth and discipleship. We are reminded that the everyday moments of life hold possibilities for us to encounter God’s love and to mature in faith, love, and hope as disciples of the risen Christ.*

than it does in our own time.<sup>1</sup> Paul's words needed no explanation and were understood and accepted by those who heard and read them.

What Paul is referring to is the idea of ultimate allegiance, loyalty, obedience, and service. To be a slave, as Paul understands it, is to surrender your life to the control of another. According to Paul, we are all slaves of one thing or another. One's master may be any number of things. Perhaps you know someone who is a "slave" to fashion? Or one that is a slave to fitness? Or someone who has pledged their allegiance to wealth? We are all serving something or someone. In Paul's mind, there are only two possible masters: righteousness (God) or sin (everything else). It is whom you serve that makes the difference.

*Reflect: What are the things that occupy my thoughts? What are the things I give my most time and attention to? How do I spend my time and money? How do these reflect my motivations?*

Yet, through baptism, Paul teaches, we have been given new life in Christ. It is the gift of God freely given to us in the fullness of grace. As we have become one with Christ, our allegiance is to God, and our lives become a reflection of Christ's love working through us.

This process of sanctification – this growth in Christ - is not something that happens automatically. It is a gradual, lifelong transformation, whereby we loosen our allegiance to those things that keep us from aligning our lives fully in Christ's love. It is a choice we make every day, to support and nurture a growth in faith and holiness. As author Frederick Buechner puts it, "...little by little, the forgiven person starts to become a forgiving person, the healed person to become a healing person, the loved person to become a loving person. God does most of it. The end of the process, Paul says, is eternal life."<sup>2</sup>

*Reflect: In what ways has my relationship to Christ changed over time? How am I growing in faith and love? In what ways do I struggle to reflect Christ's love in my life – in my attitudes, words, or actions?*

Those who are gardeners understand that certain kinds of plants need support in order to grow properly. Tomatoes need to be staked. Beans must attach themselves to suspended strings. Creeping vines, such as ivy or clematis, will grow on just about any surface they can find. Roses flourish when they can attach themselves to a trellis or an archway. Yet, without proper support, these plants would fail to flourish as they are intended. Rather than blossoming with the right space and sunlight, they would collapse on the ground in a heap, unable to reach their potential for beauty.

<sup>1</sup> In the first century, Roman slaves were generally taken as spoils of war or were those who sold themselves into slavery (as bond-servants). They were often well-educated and respected. This was a very different picture than the forced enslavement based on race which characterized the atrocities of slavery throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Further discussion is well-warranted though limited in context of this devotional.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*.

Our spiritual growth is much like these plants. We need structure and support in order to thrive to our potential. Without the proper support of spiritual practices, we become more susceptible to influences that draw us away from God's love.

*Reflect: What are the spiritual practices that I find useful in my faith journey? How has my relationship to Christ been influenced by the spiritual practices that are part of my life?*

Growth in holiness is not something we "do." Rather, it is something we allow to take hold in our lives, as we yield to the Holy Spirit to shape and transform us. Paul describes the fruitfulness of this transforming love in our lives in this way: *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit."* (Galatians 5:22-25)

Fruitfulness is a result of grace at work in our lives through the process of sanctification. This growth in holiness takes place in community. We need one another for support, encouragement, growth, accountability.

*Reflect upon your current spiritual practices, such as:*

*prayer, prayer, daily devotions, acts of service toward others, studying scripture, engaging in faith-related conversations with others, participation in worship and sacrament*

*What are the spiritual practices that I currently engage in that help me know the presence of Christ in my life?*

*Beyond those practices listed, what other ways do I connect with God in my life?*

*Are there new spiritual practices that I would like to introduce into my life?*

*How does my participation in my faith community help support my relationship to God?*

### Prayer

Loving Christ, in you, we are on the way to living right.

In you, we are on the way to becoming the people God intended us to be.

In you, we are on the way where the chains of self and sin fall off.

In you, we are on the way to life, full and free, as free as the gift of God's love, in which we are embraced for all eternity.

Amen.

### Blessing

*"May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. (1Thessalonians 5:23-24)*