

## Thank You

Today is Choir Sunday, and I am so thankful for our two choirs and Allen. One of my favorite songs that our choir has performed is “No Turning Back.” Today’s text tells us that once we have life in Jesus, there’s no turning back to a life of sin. The choir performed it last month at Gospel Night, and at Gospel Night, Cassie reminded me that the choir sang it the Sunday morning before my installation service in the evening. Of course, Cassie and I joked that this song selection felt a little ominous, as we didn’t know exactly what this church would hold for us, and now there was “No Turning Back.” Last Sunday, we celebrating our first year here at First Presbyterian, and looking back a year, when we half-nervously joked about the song “No Turning Back,” I could not have imagined how wonderful this call has been. Cassie and I reflected all week as we read notes from you all at how blessed we are to be here. The first year wasn’t easy, and many of you have been graceful and forgiving when I’ve stumbled in places as a first-time pastor, but it was always filled with joy and confidence in God’s call. This first year has made Cassie and me feel so loved and welcomed, and has given us great hope for what we can all do as we continue working together to reflect Christ here in Quincy together. Cassie and I believe that the future is bright at First Presbyterian Church, and we are humbled and excited that God has us here. I can’t imagine being happier or more fulfilled by a call. Thank you, everyone, for making this year so special. There is no turning back, and we wouldn’t have it any other way.

## **Introduction**

Today we continue in Paul's letter to the Romans. Last week we rested in the fact that we are saved by grace. We do not earn all that God has done for us in Christ, we do not earn salvation, but God gives it to us freely in faith. Now, Paul, the author of Romans, is a smart guy. He's the kind of writer who anticipates his opponents arguments. So he sees where some might take this new truth. If we are saved by grace, if God forgives our sins and saves us...why should I stop sinning? In fact, Paul, if what you're saying is true, then if I continue sinning or sin even more, I receive more grace and more forgiveness. Why should I stop sinning? This is what Paul believes will be the argument, and so he takes it on full force. That's what today's passage is: it is Paul making a counterargument and confronting the question: why should I stop sinning?

### **Read Romans 6:1-4**

"Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" Paul responds, "By no means!" in our translation, which really doesn't do justice to how strongly Paul disagrees with that notion. Think of the strongest way you could say "No" to someone. Without using choice words, Paul is yelling "Of course not!!!"

And then Paul tells us why should no longer live in sin. Because our perspectives are forever changed. We died with Christ in his death, and we have been raised with Christ in his resurrection, we

are new. Christ's death and resurrection are perspective changers.

## **Romans 6: Perspective Changer**

Cassie told me a story from a book she's reading on aging called "Being Mortal." There's a Stanford psychologist who studies the emotional well-being of people as they age. Her studies have found that as people age, they get happier; they are less prone to anxiety and depression. They have greater satisfaction with their lives. We might think that this is because as they gain wisdom and experience, they realize that there's more to life than what a younger person might stress about. Surely this is at least part of it, but this psychologist dug deeper. What if it was less about age and more about perspective?

She knew about that from personal experience. When she was 21, she had a near-death experience, as she piled into a VW van with a bunch of drunk friends, and the van rolled. She broke several bones, had terrible internal bleeding, and was lucky to be alive. She wound up in the hospital with casts on all four limbs. Now, at this point in her life, she had only a high school diploma and no plans to go to college. I imagine that's not the typical path of world-renowned Stanford scholars. But her time in the hospital gave her perspective that she might not have otherwise gained until she was much older. Her studies have found that a person's perspective of how much more time they have to live is actually the more important factor than age when it comes to this finding that older folks are happier and less stressed than younger folks.

That perspective comes with age but it doesn't only come with age. Our perspective changes slowly over time or quickly in major events like near-death experiences. This car accident completely changed her perspective, and now she's one of the foremost experts in how perspective affects a person's psychology.

So, spurred by this new lease on life, she now studies how perspective changes through life. That as one ages, they narrow their perspective on relationships and activities that matter most. But she also says that young people who have had near-death experiences, or who are suffering from terminal illnesses, also narrow their perspective. Our perspectives change, either gradually with age or quickly with injuries or illness, to make us focus on what's important.

Paul argues that our greatest and most significant perspective change is when we realize and embrace that in Christ we have died to sin and been raised to true life. That narrows our focus on what's important. And when our perspective causes our focus to be narrowed on Christ and righteousness, why would we ever want to return to a life of sin? That's what Paul is saying when he says, "By no means!" When we are in Jesus, we have died to sin and are made alive in resurrection. When we are in Jesus, we are made new. When we are in Jesus, there is no way we would want to return to a life of sin. When we are in Jesus, there is no turning back.

## **Romans 6: Newness**

When we die to sin and are alive to God thanks to Jesus, we get to walk in newness of life, verse four tells us. When you know the joy of salvation, the joy of resurrection, the joy of being known and loved by the Creator of the cosmos, everything changes, everything is new. Your desire is no longer to sin, it is to be just and righteous and loving. Look at the final paragraph, **Read Romans 6:12-14.**

When our perspective changes, when we walk in newness of life thanks to Christ's resurrection, it's not just our hearts or our minds or our souls that are changed, it's also our bodies and how we use our bodies. Christianity is an embodied faith. Christianity is a faith that we live in the flesh because God came to earth in the flesh. When we are disciples of Jesus, we will no longer use our bodies for sin, or as Paul says, as "instruments of wickedness." Now, we use our bodies as "instruments of righteousness."

## **Conclusion**

On this Choir Sunday, we celebrate that these folks sitting behind me use their bodies as literal instruments to lead us in worship week in and week out. It is their work that inspired me to choose Psalm 96 as today's Old Testament reading. I want to read for you again the first two verses: "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day." I can't imagine a better Scripture passage to tie together Choir Sunday and Romans 6, which tells us that we now walk in newness thanks to Christ's resurrection. "O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all

the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.”

Christ’s death and resurrection are perspective changers. Now we are called to use our lives for righteousness. We are made new. In this newness of life, we are called to sing a new song to God, singing about the salvation we have in Jesus from day to day.