

Trinity Sunday
May 31, 2015
“No Loose Ends”
Central Presbyterian Church, Montclair
David Noble

Romans 8.12-17

¹²So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—
¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

A

There is a digital clock at a busy intersection in Manhattan that does not tell time, at least not in the ordinary way. It is the national debt clock that shows second by second what the national debt amounts to. When I looked at the clock online on Friday at 12 noon, the national debt was \$18,246,676,700,000 and it was rising at a rate of \$10,000 per second.

That debt is familiar to many of us who have car loans and mortgages and credit cards. Hopefully we have those debts under control. But there are many people who do not. Jobs are lost, companies file for bankruptcy, an illness strikes, or an accident happens, and debt is one consequence. Our friends at Interfaith Hospitality Network deal with this all the time as they help their homeless clients get a grip on their finances, find jobs, and create a path toward more sustainable lives.

Money is not the only debt we encounter, however. Someone takes us to dinner and we feel indebted to pay them back with a meal sometime in the future. As my family has grown in size with my children finding significant others to include in the family, we have struggled with what to do at Christmas. Should we give gifts to everyone in the family? When we receive a gift are we indebted to give one in return? We decided to draw names and for each to give a gift to one person. In our culture, debt is usually to be avoided at all possible.

B

But the Apostle Paul tells the Roman Christians and us, ‘We are all debtors, no matter what,’ debtors to God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. If Christ is in us, Paul says, then God’s Spirit of Life is in us too. And if that Spirit is in you, he says, then one day your body will be raised in resurrection just like Jesus’ body was resurrected first.

Be alive in that Spirit. That’s what Paul wants us to be. We are all debtors but not debtors to the flesh.

We need to parse that idea for a second. When Paul talks about flesh he is not talking about this kind of flesh (pinch your arm). Don't get the idea that flesh and blood is bad. That's an old heresy called Gnosticism. This heresy still circulates among many Christians and non-Christians who believe that the soul or spirit is trapped in the body, and that the body is an imperfect container that is something we hope our soul will escape someday. Paul is not talking about the body in this way. In fact he, and Christians throughout history, have held the body to be a good part of creation, so good that God wanted Jesus to experience the body, and that God resurrects bodies, starting with Jesus.

When Paul talks about flesh he is really referring to our behavior, our lifestyle—whatever our patterns of thinking and feeling and acting are. And those patterns are often sinful. We do things and say words and think thoughts that are simply human—that are twisted or hurtful or offensive. That is living in the flesh.

Where I grew up that was called looking out for Number One, getting mine while the getting's good.

C

Will we always be tempted to live in this way? Of course we will. It's natural. But there is another choice—we can live by the Spirit and be led by the Spirit.

We can develop a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting that recognizes how we are part of a larger picture that God is painting. And if we are to stick with how Paul understands this picture of love and grace that God is creating in this world, then we are to honor each other above ourselves, to sacrifice our own rights and privileges if that helps nurture someone else's faith, and to love all others with Christ's love as our example.

But being a Christian is not just about being good. Many people can be good.

Being a Christian and being led by the Spirit also means developing a relationship with the Spirit just as we develop relationships with our friends. It just doesn't happen on its own. We need to spend time with the Spirit in prayer, and in quiet, and listening. It means asking the Spirit for direction and help. Just try it. In your prayer time every day leave some time for quiet and ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you. If you have a question, ask it. If you have a problem, share it. If you need direction, seek it. Trust me, try it.

D

As we live more and more deliberately in the Spirit we begin to realize that we are children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ. God has adopted us and we share in Jesus' inheritance, including the resurrection of our bodies, joining Jesus in heaven to be with God, and living side by side with all God's children in the kingdom that Jesus will bring on that last day- a kingdom where all will share love and grace and mercy in the ways Jesus has already shared it among us.

So we are people who look to a hopeful future, to a promising time to come, toward which the Holy Spirit is guiding us. This is Paul's point for us. Think about what is coming, about the day we are destined to share with Christ. Keep your eyes on **that** day as you live **these** days.

In my home there are countless handmade bedspreads and blankets and tablecloths and afghans, all of them made by my mother or my mother-in-law. Here is an example.... One of the interesting things about their work is that you can't really tell where they started. And more importantly for us today, you can't really tell where they ended, because they took the last few inches of yarn or thread and wove it back up into what they were making, so the very end of their work became part of the whole creation.

E

So here is Paul's hope for us:

First- we recognize that we who are indebted to God's love and forgiveness and gift of new life,

Second- we take the end toward which we are living, the glorious end, the heavenly end of peace and grace and mercy that is coming, and live it in the life we are living today.

Let that life in the Spirit permeate now all that we do and say and think.

****As you have been set free by God's love and look forward to a new world rooted in love, set others free by your love today.**

****As you are indebted to the Holy Spirit for having led you into a relationship with God, lead others to also trust God's grace and mercy today.**

F

The end toward which the Holy Spirit is leading us, when God's kingdom is fully here, is not just a future for which we wait. That future is meant to be entwined with today and tomorrow, in anticipation of all we will share with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and with each other. And may we grow in our relationship with the Holy Spirit who is guiding us and nurturing us in that new life.

Let us be people who live in the Holy Spirit. And let us be people who are led by that same Spirit.