

Sunday 28th June 2026. Benefice Holy Communion, Gilling.

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace”.

In the Epistle today, Paul writes in Romans about being freed from sin and ‘enslaved’ to God, not in the way of being a slave as we understand it but freed from the slavery of our sinful selves into a new way of being and living.

This is what God longs for every one of us: a whole, healed, put-together life. Not a life where we are barely holding things together, smiling on the outside while something inside feels tired, burdened, or afraid. God wants real life for us. Eternal life. Abundant life. The life that Jesus gives. Jesus says in John, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” That is the life we were created for. It is the life our hearts ache for, even when we do not know how to name it. But, if we are honest, it is not always the life we actually live. Something gets in the way. Something pulls us away from God, from one another, and from our truest selves. Paul gives that something a name: sin. So, the question for us today is deeply personal: how do we stop living under sin’s power and receive again the life Jesus gives?

Paul’s answer is not easy. Christian freedom is not simply doing whatever we feel like doing. It is being set free to become the people God made us to be. That matters, because many of us know what it feels like to be trapped – by guilt, old habits, fear, or the sense that we will never really change. Into that place, Paul speaks a word of hope: in Christ, we can be free.

That is quite different from the way our world often talks about freedom. For many people, freedom means, “No one can tell me what to do.” It means being free to do whatever I want. But Paul says something different. We have been made *free from sin* and because we have been made free from sin, we are now free for God and free for our neighbour.

So if we want to be free from sin, we need to listen to another voice. We need to listen to God. Because the truth is, we are all listening to something. Some voices are loud and cruel. They tell us we are not enough, that we are too far gone, that we cannot be forgiven, that nothing will ever be different. But the voice of God speaks something deeper and truer: “You are mine. You are loved. Come home.” So it is worth asking: what voice is shaping me? What message am I letting guide my life?

We do not have to listen to sin. We do not have to let it be the loudest voice in the room. We do not have to be defined by our worst mistakes, deepest regrets, or patterns that have held us for too long. Jesus sets us free so that we can listen to God, follow him, love him, and love our neighbour. We do not have to live only for ourselves. We are free from that. We are free to love and serve without constantly asking, “What do I get out of this?” and that really is a wonderful freedom.

That is true freedom, what St Paul describes as being “under grace”. Not worrying all the time about who gets the credit. Not being stuck at the centre of my own little world. True freedom is being able to live in love – for God, and for the people God puts in front of us. This is the life Jesus came to give us. He gave himself for us so

that the chains we could not break by ourselves would not have the final word.

Furthermore, we don't have to wait until eternity to find this. The Kingdom comes to us instead, is here with us now if we are prepared to find it wholeheartedly and become a disciple of Jesus. When we stop listening to sin, ask for forgiveness and begin listening to God, we begin to receive that whole, healed, put-together life right now. St Paul has a word for that: *sanctification*. It simply means that God is making us holy. Not all at once, not overnight, but slowly, faithfully, day by day; sometimes so slowly we can hardly see it. But God sees it. God is not finished with us. The more we ask for His forgiveness the more He forgives and we become less controlled by sin and more shaped by Christ, because His love and forgiveness never ends. Martin Luther put it beautifully when he said:

“This life is not a being holy but a becoming holy; it is not a being well but a getting well; it is not a being but a becoming; it is not inactivity but practice.”

That is where we are. We are not finished yet. None of us is. We are still becoming. Still healing. Still learning to listen to God and still being forgiven. That means our story is not over. The parts of us that feel broken are not beyond God's reach. The places where we feel tired, ashamed, or afraid are not hidden from God's love, and thankfully, we are not doing this alone. We walk this road with the God who made us, with the Son who saves us, and with the Spirit who stays with us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.