

Romans 6

12 So then, don't let sin rule your body, so that you do what it wants. **13** Don't offer parts of your body to sin, to be used as weapons to do wrong. Instead, present yourselves to God as people who have been brought back to life from the dead, and offer all the parts of your body to God to be used as weapons to do right. **14** Sin will have no power over you, because you aren't under Law but under grace.

15 So what? Should we sin because we aren't under Law but under grace? Absolutely not! **16** Don't you know that if you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, that you are slaves of the one whom you obey? That's true whether you serve as slaves of sin, which leads to death, or as slaves of the kind of obedience that leads to righteousness. **17** But thank God that although you used to be slaves of sin, you gave wholehearted obedience to the teaching that was handed down to you, which provides a pattern. **18** Now that you have been set free from sin, you have become slaves of righteousness. **19** (I'm speaking with ordinary metaphors because of your limitations.) Once, you offered the parts of your body to be used as slaves to impurity and to lawless behavior that leads to still more lawless behavior. Now, you should present the parts of your body as slaves to righteousness, which makes your lives holy. **20** When you were slaves of sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. **21** What consequences did you get from doing things that you are now ashamed of? The outcome of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and become slaves to God, you have the consequence of a holy life, and the outcome is eternal life. **23** The wages that sin pays are death, but God's gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalm 89

I will sing of the Lord's loyal love forever.

I will proclaim your faithfulness
with my own mouth
from one generation to the next.

2 That's why I say,

"Your[b] loyal love is rightly built—forever!
You establish your faithfulness in heaven."

3 You said,[c] "I made a covenant with my chosen one;

I promised my servant David:

4 'I will establish your offspring forever;

I will build up your throne from one generation to the next.'" Selah

5 Heaven thanks you for your wondrous acts, Lord—

for your faithfulness too—
in the assembly of the holy ones.

6 Is there any in the sky who could compare to the Lord?

Who among the gods is equal to the Lord?

7 God is respected in the council of the holy ones;

God is awesome and revered more than all those around him.

8 Who is like you, Lord God of heavenly forces?

Mighty Lord, your faithfulness surrounds you!
9 You rule over the surging sea:
 When its waves rise up,
 it's you who makes them still.
10 It's you who crushed Rahab like a dead body;
 you scattered your enemies with your strong arm.
11 Heaven is yours! The earth too!
 The world and all that fills it—
 you made all of it! North and south—you created them!
12 The mountains Tabor and Hermon
 shout praises to your name.
13 You have a powerful arm;
 your hand is strong;
 your strong hand is raised high!
14 Your throne is built on righteousness and justice;
 loyal love and faithfulness stand in front of you.
15 The people who know the celebratory shout are truly happy!
 They walk in the light of your presence, Lord!
16 They rejoice in your name all day long
 and are uplifted by your righteousness
17 because you are the splendor of their strength.
By your favor you make us strong
18 because our shield is the Lord's own;
 our king belongs to the holy one of Israel!

Matthew 10

40 "Those who receive you are also receiving me, and those who receive me are receiving the one who sent me. **41** Those who receive a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Those who receive a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. **42** I assure you that everybody who gives even a cup of cold water to these little ones because they are my disciples will certainly be rewarded."

Sermon

**May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer:
Amen.**

Science fiction, as a genre, offers us incredible thought projects into the meaning life, the potential for human development, and the possibility of what exists beyond on own knowledge or sphere of influence. This could be books, like World War Z or I Am Legend, graphic novels throughout the Marvel and DC universes, or video productions like ARQ, The Discovery, or Sense8. And yet, the line perhaps most associated with science fiction comes is almost certainly, “Take me to your leader.” The first variation appeared in an 1957 cartoon in *The New Yorker*, by Alex Graham, with two aliens encountering a horse and saying to the equine, “Kindly take us to your president.” Though this became cliché almost immediately, leadership indeed plays an essential

role in the genre, especially issues around authority, power, and who's worthy to wield such influence over people.

We see something like this in Paul's words to the Romans. Paul's talking about leadership, and in particular, whether we as God's people submit to the leader's sin, or we follow God's leadership that we see most clearly in Christ. Key to Paul's thinking here is the human potential in light of God leadership. He makes the possibilities seem pretty simple. Following sin leads to death. Following Jesus leads to life. The leader we follow determines the future we live. But something tells me it's not so simple. Even our own Lutheran theology tells us that we're simultaneously sinners and saints. There's two leaders competing for our attention, Jesus and sin. While that might seem like an easy choice to make, we often find ourselves making the sinful choice instead of living the life of Christ. It's difficult because sin feels good at first, but like too much junk food and not enough exercise lead to atrophy our

bodies, sin eventually leads to atrophy in whole lives. The leader we follow determines the future we live, but it's not always easy to determine what leader we should follow.

A recurring theme in my life is my incredibly limited comprehension for math. While I had a number of great math teachers in my life, Mr. Schuyfler and Mr. Young chief among them, I also had a number that were, well, less than exemplary. Perhaps not at math, but as teachers. Teachers that yelled frequently in the classroom. Teachers that did the littlest amount of work possible. Teachers that verbally told my classmates that they didn't care how they performed in the class and didn't expect much at all from them. I'm not blaming my current capacity for math on these teachers, but I'll tell you this: I never wanted to do what they wanted me to do.

There's big difference between what feels good and what gives life. Yelling at people who are disruptive in the classroom

might feel good, but it doesn't lead to a better life. Avoiding situations that make us uncomfortable, that might make us work harder, might feel easier, but easiness doesn't lead to growth. The few lines that Jesus speaks in today's Gospel indicates that how we live reflects our allegiance. Living Christ's hospitality to others opens us to the hospitality God offers to us. Giving others simple gifts, even the gift of water to quench their thirst, opens us to the gifts of baptismal water that God offers to quench our thirst for abundant life. God built us with a potential for life beyond our current limitations, with vast potential, but to access that potential, to grow into the fullness of life available to us, we need to follow the leader that gave us that potential for life abundant.

Now, this might feel like a threat, or an ultimatum. That's not it. Paul's entire argument passage assumes new life. Rejuvenation at God's hands empowers us to live differently, so we must choose what example we will follow, the guru at whose feet we'll sit, what

leader we will serve. Remember, Paul's writing in light of salvation, to people who want to live life to the full. We aren't left to our own power to make this happen. Through the Holy Spirit, God's alive inside of us, at work within us, confronting the sin that wants to rule our world and crumbling it's reign.

There's a legend, attributed to many different origins including the Cherokee natives that once ruled this area of Southwest Virginia. A grandmother told her granddaughter, "There's two wolves alive inside of us. One wolf is full of darkness and despair, fear, hatred, and greed. The other wolf, full of light and hope, kindness, bravery, and love. One evil, the other good. These wolves are always fighting, trying to control you, trying to win out over the other." As you might expect, the granddaughter asks, "which one wins, grandmother?" Grandmother leans in, at first only offering a piercing gaze, then a convicting smile, before she finally says, "the one you feed."

Who's will do you choose to do? What wolf will you feed?

Which leader will you follow? Remember, God's already acted to bring you salvation. It's not about earning anything. You're not trying to prove yourself worthy of God's love. God loves us despite our failures and faults, despite our shortcomings. Instead, this is about embodying the gift of new life that you've been given. In Paul's words, "present yourselves to God as people who have been brought back to life from the dead, and offer all the parts of your body to God to be used as weapons to do right. Sin will have no power over you, because you aren't under Law but under grace." Now, this isn't the power of positive thinking. Paul's not saying you can make yourself wealthy by just imagining that you're wealthy, or that you can make yourself fly by just believing you can fly, because wealth and flight aren't inherent to you. But because God, through Christ's work, has come to live inside of you by the Holy Spirit, you have been brought back to life from the dead.

Living that way is accessing the fullness of God already alive inside of you. Present yourself to God that way, and behold, you'll experience new life, God's life, resurrection life in more profound ways than you could have ever imagined before.

That will look like all sorts of different things. We've got 21 people here who've chosen to give a week out of their summer to the Appalachian service project, deepening their faith in God through serving others. That's living resurrection life. This fall, we're starting a Wednesday after school program to provide a safe place for middle and high schoolers to relax, to get some homework help, and provide a meal for students who face food insecurity at home. That's living resurrection life. This year, we're hosting book release parties for three different artists connected to our congregation, celebrating God's image in art and artists from the region. That's living resurrection life.

When you take a look at this kind of commitment, it often feels daunting. How can you give up part of your summer for others? How can a little church grow an after school ministry? If we've never done these things before, that's an understandable feeling. But here's the thing. You'll never know how much you can do until you do more than you think you can. God's equipped us for more than mediocrity. We're meant for more than "just fine," more than "meh." God's empowered us for these things, and so much more. There's a reason that the church was at the forefront of the Civil Rights Movement, that the church's acts of caring for the sick during plagues throughout history led to the modern hospital system, that the church's activity in the arts have created fantastic expressions of beauty across cultures and celebrated God's presence in every one of them. We're called, as a church, to extravagant things, not because we're able on our own, but because Christ is alive in us, and we're now meant to live Christ's

life, to live the life of one whose been brought back to life from the dead, because it baptism, we have. We're called to crumble the mountains of racism and bridge the gorges of xenophobia and infect the systems of homophobia, to bring the resurrection we have in the sinews of our bodies to the flesh of every person.

Of course, conquering fear and hatred of people that aren't like us can seem out of our reach. It would be, if God weren't alive in us. But that's just where Holy Spirit dwells. In each and every one of you. The unlimited God is at home in you, so what are the limits to the good that you can do? Something tells me you can do more than you've ever imagined. Now, it's time to follow the leader. It's time to feed the good wolf. It's time to live resurrection life. Amen.