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Pentecost V & Proper 8

June 28, 2026

Text: Romans 7:1 – 13

Title: The Resurrecting Christ (based on the Sermon Series “God’s Greater Story” by Dr. D. Schmidt of CSL, used by permission)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Our text this morning continues in Paul’s letter to the Romans. This letter or epistle proclaims the power of the Resurrecting Christ. The apostle Paul first sent it to the church in Rome as an introduction before his planned visit, but today it comes to us to bring life and hope to our world.

The power of Christ is found not only in today’s text, but it also flows throughout St. Paul’s letter. Consider how he opens it back in the opening chapter, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus . . . [who] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (1:1 and 4). Here, Paul presents himself in language very similar to that used by servants of Caesar, only the powerful ruler that Paul serves is not Caesar. Paul serves Jesus Christ, the ruler of all things, declared to be the Son of God in power by His resurrection from the dead. Paul then states the main theme of this letter: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (1:16). Paul’s letter is all about power. The power of the Gospel to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Finally, consider how Paul closes the letter, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (16:20, cf. also 15:18-19). God’s power is there at the beginning of Paul’s letter, at the end of Paul’s letter, and all the way through it. Paul’s letter is filled with the power of the resurrecting Christ, bringing life and salvation to all people.

And why wouldn’t it be? Paul, himself, had met the resurrected Christ and, in that meeting on the road to Damascus, Paul discovered Jesus to be more than the resurrected Christ. He was also the resurrecting Christ. When Jesus appeared after His resurrection, He changed

lives – Mary outside the tomb mourning, Thomas in the room doubting, Peter out on the lake fishing. Individuals raised from sorrow and fear and discouragement to New Life. And last but not least, the apostle Paul. Christ appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and raised him to New Life. Paul now proclaims this power to all people, to the church at Rome and to us today. Paul turns our eyes to Jesus, because Jesus raises us to New Life.

But Jesus is hard to see at times. People are looking everywhere except to Christ. For the church in Rome, Paul was concerned that people were looking to the Law as a source of life. Israel believed in God's Law, there's no question about that. God's Law, or the Torah, was good. It was a design for life and they couldn't imagine their relationship with God apart from it. They saw the Law as power for life. They turned to that Law, seeking to obey it, in order to participate in God's life in the world. Unfortunately, they were so focused on the Law that they lost sight of the Christ who was there to bring the Gospel.

It's like a family that brings the kids to Sunday school not because they want them to grow in relationship with Jesus, but because they want their kids to learn the Ten Commandments and have a good moral foundation. Later, they might choose to follow God in any religion; but for now, what is important is that they get the basics. The Law of God. That family sees the law as holy and righteous and good. But they have lost sight of God and His complete message. They have lost Jesus and the Gospel.

Paul writes this letter to be sure that no one sees the Law without seeing Jesus. And Paul does this because he knows the terrifying power of the Law. It has power, all right. The power to awaken our sin. Although the Romans may see life in the Law, Paul knows that eventually they will see death if they fail to see anything more. God's Law is good, that's certain, but our lives are not. Far from it. Holding on to the Law without Christ is like holding on to a knife as it cuts

you to death. The Law has condemning power. Paul writes that it arouses “our sinful passions.” When you hear what you are not supposed to do, you end up wanting to do it. Paul didn’t know what coveting was until he was told not to covet and then sin awakened and created all kinds of coveting within him. Sin comes alive and we end up dying. Dying while holding on to the good Law of God.

That is why the Holy Spirit, through Paul points us to Christ. The One who dies while holding on to us. We were sinners in the hands of an angry God but now we are sinners in the hands of our gracious Savior. Christ saw us in our sin and offered His Life for our salvation. He died under the condemning power of the Law for you. Through His dead body Jesus Christ sets you free from the Law’s demands.

As Paul writes, “Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the Law through the body of Christ.” In His death, Christ puts to death the condemning power of the Law. By His death, Christ brings New Life to you. Those who see the Law and hold on to it without Christ will ultimately die. You, however, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized into His death and, by His death, Christ sets you free. Paul reveals the power of Christ to set you free from the condemning power of the Law and to raise you to life as a child of God.

It seems odd to be living in America, and to be listening to Paul tell us about freedom. After all, we Americans pride ourselves on freedom. We’re about to celebrate 250 years of it! Freedom of speech, freedom of the press, academic freedom . . . the list goes on and on. In fact, in America, our infatuation with freedom has led some to believe that they have the freedom to rewrite the Laws of God and create a different way of living in the world.

In Deuteronomy, God commanded Israel to remember His commandments, to “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads” (Deut. 6:8). And that’s exactly what

they did. God's people literally tied His Word to their bodies, winding leather straps up their arms, and fastening it on their foreheads in little boxes. For many, that's how the Law of God feels today. Christianity is binding. They think that it's a religion filled with rules and regulations that are against having a good time. It constrains you and drains you of the joy of life. You can't do what you want when Jesus calls you to love your neighbor. You can't follow others when Jesus calls you to follow Him.

So, some Christians celebrate a freedom from God's good design. A distinctly American false freedom from the Laws of God. Take God's good design of marriage or human sexuality. Such things can be redefined to fit our present day as we've seen throughout our country with things like gay marriage. It is our manifest destiny to redefine the ways of God for our 21st century world. These redefinitions of God's Law stress that God is loving and good and wants you to be happy. His love and His goodness set you free to be whatever you want to be. Old notions of sin and punishment and the Law of God are discarded as we live in the freedom of the American dream and claim that God is loving toward us and good.

Such attitudes, however, would seem strange to the apostle Paul. The Law of God is not something you can redefine. The Law is God's, and He literally wrote it in stone. It is part of God's design, and it has been built into creation. You can delude yourself that it doesn't exist or that it doesn't matter to God. But in the end, you will be held accountable to God. A person could pretend that laws don't exist in our community. She could go into a store and simply walk away with merchandise taken from the shelf. She could go into a home that she likes and try to start living there. In the end, however, she would discover that she is not alone, she does not make her own laws, but she is part of a larger community and she does live under that law.

So, too, Paul wants you to know that you are not alone. God does exist and rules over all creation. He has set His Law in place and everyone will be held accountable to it before Him. But don't be afraid. He has claimed you in the death of Christ, to free you from the condemning power of the Law; and He has also raised you in the life of Christ to live and bear fruit for Him.

Christ stands there, on the edge of Paul's letter, ruling over the world and raising people to New Life in Him. That's why St. Paul doesn't stop after writing about the death of Christ. He continues. He writes about the resurrection of Christ because he knows that we have been raised to New Life in Christ. Paul writes, "Likewise my brothers, you have also died to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God" (7:4). With these words, Paul turns our attention to the resurrecting Christ. He not only frees us from the condemning power of the Law but He forms us by His Holy Spirit to live as a people for God. In Him, our lives are shaped by the Spirit and they reveal the goodness of God's Law, God's ways, God's people in the world.

Paul's letter invites you to live in the power of the Resurrecting Christ. You have already died to the Law, but in the Resurrecting Christ you are raised up to a New Life in the Gospel. You are joined to His Resurrection through Baptism and made new with Jesus. Though you do not see Him now, you know that He is risen and ruling over all things. His Law is holy. His commandments are holy and righteous and good. In Him, you have died to the curse of the Law, in His body crucified for you as a sacrifice that pays for all sin on the cross. In Him, you have been raised to a New Life in the Holy Spirit through Holy Baptism. And you are only now beginning to experience the first fruits of faith in the Kingdom of God. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.