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## The Third Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2021

### We Live in the Saving Light of Jesus

Every person on the face of the earth stands at a spiritual crossroad: life with Jesus leads in one direction and life without him leads in another. With Jesus there is light and life and love; without him there is darkness and death and rebellion. Jesus is with us as we confront the crossroad and keeps us on the path with him.

<b>First Reading</b>	Numbers 21:4-9 <i>With a strange cure the Lord heals Israel.</i>
<b>Second Reading</b>	Romans 8:1-10 <i>We gain life and freedom with Christ by faith.</i>
<b>Gospel</b>	John 3:14-21 <i>God sent his Son to save the world.</i>
<b>Sermon</b>	Romans 8:1-10

### You're Free!

So, now you are standing before God, the judge. You're the defendant. Satan's standing there ready to accuse you. He has the stack of your sins, ready to list one after the other. He is ready to show you that you can't enter heaven. But you don't need him, your heart tells you that regularly. After Satan lists all your sins, God looks at you with his blazing, fiery eyes and says, "Why should I let you into heaven?" As a child this question scared me. In fact, the whole illustration scared me. I would think, "What if I say the wrong thing or I say the right thing but not quite as right as I should? Would I still get into heaven?" Have you ever wondered this? Have you ever flipped through the mental scrapbook of your life and gotten stuck on past sins? As you reflect on those sins, do you feel the weight of Satan's accusation and worry about standing before God? Have you wondered if you have done enough for God? If so, today, Paul has a message for you and me. There is no condemnation for you. You're free, you don't have to do anything! God fulfilled his justice for you so that you now live according to his Spirit.

Paul wrote this message to focus the Roman church on how God's love and salvation impact the life of a believer. God took sin's consequences away. Yet, sin still lives inside of a believer. Paul writes about his own struggle with sin, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate, I do." Sin is part of his life. He has no hope, except for in Jesus who set him free.

God set up a straightforward law at the very beginning. If someone sins, they die. If they don't sin, they live. This is a perfectly good and right set up. However, people sinned and now they die. So, even though it is good and right, it can't give life. The law can't save, because of sin. Later, in verse 7 and 8, Paul writes that the sinful mind is only hostile to God. It wouldn't submit to him, even if it could. So, not only is the law powerless to save because of sin, but sin doesn't want to submit to God's law anyway. There's no hope!

That is our natural state. God's law rightfully condemns us because of our sin. The result is death. Our stubborn, sinful mind is hostile to God; it cannot submit to God's law, even if it could, it wouldn't want to. When God's law tells us don't do that, our sinful self can only want to do that and it does. I remember talking to a friend last year about the stay-at-home order. As we were talking, it struck me. Normally, I don't mind staying inside and watching Netflix or something. But, now all of a sudden, I am told I can't go out, I want to get out and go to the mall or whatever...even though that is not what I would normally want to do. The only reason I want to go is that now I am being told not to go. Isn't that how the sinful nature operates? It hears 'don't do this' or 'do this' and wants to do the exact opposite, even if it normally wouldn't want to act that way. So, when God's law commands it, it feels constrained and wants to break free. It wants to do the opposite. That only results in breaking God's law, which results in punishment, eternal death in hell.

Since the law was powerless to save us, God sent his Son to save. He came in a likeness of sinful man, to live and keep the law for us perfectly. He condemned sin, by taking it and dying with it to fulfill the righteous requirement. No punishment is left, God fulfilled his justice. So, when God opens the book about your life, all he sees is Christ's righteousness. There is no mention of your sins anywhere on its pages. Satan can flip through it all of eternity and have nothing on you!

Without accusations, you're free: free from fear, free from Satan's accusing voice, free from sin. You live in God's peace. Since you are free from sin, now you live according to the Spirit. You live according to the Spirit because he is the one who set you free from sin and death.

Those who have the Spirit have the Spirit's characteristics. For example, their mindset is on the Spirit's desires. They think carefully about and absorb themselves in what the Spirit desires. It is like an employee that loves his work and his employer. That employee can't help but absorb themselves in their work and look forward to helping the employer. That person is overjoyed to commit to the work of the employer. In the same way, believers absorb themselves in what God's Spirit desires. God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Those who live according to the Spirit will also desire for all people to be saved, therefore, they will reach out to others anyway they can. Also, God desires his people live at peace with each other, harboring no anger. Those living according to the Spirit will also desire the same peace. Those who live according to the Spirit will be glad to live this way.

Moreover, they don't only desire to do what God wants, but actually do it. They submit to God's law, please God, and are in a loving relationship with God. This is natural for those who live according to the Spirit because God lives in them and empowers them to live according to his commands.

That might seem too good to be true for you, but that is who you are. You live according to the Spirit because God set you free from sin and now lives inside you. And even though you might look at your own life, see your sin, and wonder if you truly have the Spirit living you, you can know that you do. You do because Christ gave his life for you. Even though you struggle with your sin in your lives, you can know that you are not a slave to that sin. God set you free. As you struggle against sin in your life, know

that you have a Spirit who works in you to help you fight that sin. You also have the Spirit that reminds you of the fact that you stand free before our God.

You don't need to fear the end or any question that God might ask you. Satan has nothing to accuse you of. There is no court case against you. In fact, the courtroom door is closed, but the door to heaven is opened wide for you. Amen.