

Sermon for Morning Prayer

July 19, 2026

Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Fr. Herb

Psalm 18:1-20

Hosea 14

Rom.6:12-18

There are two and only two choices open to every person. These options carry serious consequences. Either one is a slave of sin or or, one is a slave of righteousness. Says one theologian, there is no neutrality. If you think about it, one is never free from any master, and those non believers who think that they are “free” are under an illusion created by Satan. He is the one who will in the end, betray them and accuse them of choosing “free”. So I am passing on an offer from Paul : you now have a chance to become “slaves of righteousness.” Many of you already are; you just haven’t heard such outrage about your personhood before.

Being a slave of righteousness and a slave of obedience sounds to our 21st century ears like a mixed offering at best..slavery of any kind seeming intolerable.. and the righteousness part somehow high falutin’. It requires consistent focus on the way Paul thought to understand in the end that the “slavery of righteousness” describes not bondage to a puritanical code imposed on us from the outside or the Bible..but just the opposite.

So I’ll tell you a story that illuminates the godly beauty of Paul’s “slavery of righteousness”.: Once there was a father with a long criminal history behind him. He was currently serving out a long prison sentence for having broken a window to steal a loaf of bread to feed his ailing niece. Now he did win his parole, but could not find a “keeper” anywhere until one day a bishop comes upon him and takes him in to his own home.

The man returns the loving-kindness by stealing the bishop’s silver and absconding into the night with it. Of course, the authorities apprehend the man who tells them in jail that the Bishop has made a generous gift to him of all this silver. On the way with him to the bishops residence, the police and we are absolutely correct in thinking that the man is not telling the truth. So if they ask the bishop, he will confirm the man’s story is a lie...

Instead, the bishop confirms the man's story and goes further, telling the man he left part of his gift behind. The bishop gives the man the two best candlesticks he left behind, blesses the two policemen, and dispatches them all.

Now how will the Lord or Hosea who are justly angry with Israel and Gomer and **us** at times, acquire slaves of righteousness to share in his household, his holy dwelling? And who are to be the slaves of righteousness? Does this interest you?? How does God do it?

First, by an unexplained restraint within his own nature: "For I will not contend forever": a refusal to "contend"; is to refuse to vent his anger to its full extent. And to "contend" is to enter into a covenant lawsuit, and "be angry" implies there is that which excites divine opposition and wrath. The bishop showed unexplained restraint when the stolen property came back with the sheepish accused, the man who ate a meal and a shared his roof with him.. God restrains Himself in the execution of His justice, for we are but His fragile creatures.

But imagine this: were the appropriate judgment to be passed on those with whom He contends, their vital powers, or spirit, and their hold on life itself would collapse. But, tellingly, God now says, "and the souls which **I** have made." We sense the poignancy of Hosea's crisis with his wife here in the dilemma God faces. After all, He Himself has chosen to make us. Can he therefore leave His people to languish? Can Hosea leave his wife Gomer to spiral down and away from him for her unfaithfulness? Backsliding into iniquity after iniquity after deliverance or forgiveness are Israel, Gomer, ..and we ourselves. Obedience escapes us as it did them. What then is God to do? What then was Hosea to do? Somehow He has to make us to **love being obedient**.

When Paul says that obedience leads to righteousness, he does not mean it like we're probably understanding it right now, as though righteousness were the reward for any Christian's gnarly lifelong struggle to be obedient... He means the righteousness of God is the active, re-creating power He puts in us as we recognize He is forgiving or has forgiven us.and which **ENABLES** a new life of obedience to bloom.

A man who was a slave to sin in his ongoing criminality is given a new life because of a bishop's Christ-like act of unconditional restitution. Because, as one theologian has pointed out, it is not enough to speak of the bishop's forgiveness of the man. The bishop shows the man that he is beloved of God and is a priceless creature. This incites in the man a spiritual crisis that becomes the turning point that changes his life. The bishop's act of judging as righteous the man who has just stolen his silver-surprises the policemen who bring him to the bishop's door with the goods.. But the effect on the man is life changing. Not only is he delivered from bondage to sin and chains, but he becomes a slave of righteousness.

This is what it means to be "clothed or having put on righteousness" which is a **gift**, and act of Grace. This is also what it means when "we have put on Christ" . In his new slavery of righteousness, the man understands the connection between obedience and righteousness. He is right with God, and loves his new life in Christ, so obedience is already inviting and joyful. He is just moved to it..it seems to come naturally...This man goes on to serve others in Christ's footsteps...and his name was Jean Valjean of Victor Hugo's book, Les Miserables.

I like to call the study of what God does as Theodynamics. Lets look at the passage from Hosea for a similar dynamic to the bishop's:

Suddenly all is different. Suddenly, instead of the smiting the thief deserves for his sin, his theft, he incurs undeserved and unimagined blessing from a bishop..Hosea's "Smiting" has turned to "healing"...A new edict goes out from the Lord: not because the Lord has decided to overlook the sin He has seen, but for a reason undeclared, something that is true in the heart of God and true to his nature. We heard the same something from Hosea in the prophet's love for his wayward wife, Gomer: ..when Yahweh says, " **I** will heal their backsliding..I will love them **FREELY**..irrationally..extravagantly..foolishly... For mine anger is turned away."

We now know more of God and what kind of household we as His children are to encounter. Here is the same truth from the Second Epistle of Timothy: “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful.” God cannot deny Himself. In forgiving us.. He cannot help Himself. In loving us, He empties himself

So He floods us with grace in the forgiveness of Jesus and by the power of the resurrection invites us to be “slaves of righteousness”..to experience the joy of obedience because we are enabled or ask to be, then willing -even desirous- to be so and remain so. ...How so are we then still slaves? Grace and our gratitude for new life establish our obedience in this world so radically that comparison with slavery is justifiable. Did not our Lord take the form of a slave?