

## JESUS IS LORD pt. 2

His name was Paul. He lived in a small town in the Pacific Northwest some years ago. He was just a little boy when his family became the proud owners of one of the first telephones in the neighborhood. It was one of those wooden boxes attached to the wall with the shiny receiver hanging on the side of the box... and the mouthpiece attached to the front. Young Paul listened with fascination as his mom and dad used the phone... and he discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device called a telephone lived an amazing person.

Her name was "Information Please"... and there was nothing she did not know. Information Please could supply anybody's number... and the correct time! Paul's first personal

experience with "Information Please" came one day when he was home alone and he whacked his finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible and he didn't know what to do... and then he thought of the telephone. Quickly, he pulled a footstool up to the phone, climbed up, unhooked the receiver, held it to his ear and said: "Information Please" into the mouthpiece. There was a click or two and then a small clear voice spoke: "Information." "I hurt my finger," Paul wailed into the phone. "Isn't your mother home?" "Nobody's home but me," Paul cried. "Are you bleeding?" "No," Paul said. "I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts." "Can you open your ice-box?" "Yes." "Then go get some ice and hold it to your finger." Paul did and it helped a lot.

After that Paul called "Information Please for everything. She helped him with his geography and his math. She taught him how to spell the word "fix." She told him what to feed his pet chipmunk. And then when Paul's pet canary died, she listened to his grief tenderly and then said: "Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow, that helped and Paul felt better.

When Paul was nine years old, he moved with his family to Boston... and as the years passed he missed "Information Please" very much. Some years later as Paul was on his way out west to go to college, his plane landed in Seattle. He dialed his hometown operator and said, "Information Please."

Miraculously, he heard that same small clear voice that he knew so well. "Information." Paul hadn't planned this, but suddenly he blurted out: "Could you please tell me how to spell the word "fix?" There was a long pause. Then came the soft answer: "I guess your finger must be all healed by now." Paul laughed. "So it's really still you. Do you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time when I was a little boy?" "I wonder," she said, "if you know how much your calls meant to me! I never had any children and I used to look forward to your calls so much."

Paul told her how much he had missed her over the years and asked her if he could call her again when he was back in the area. "Please do," she said, "just ask for Sally." Three months later, Paul was back in Seattle. This time a different

voice answered. He asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" the operator asked. "Yes, a very old friend." Paul answered. "Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you this," she said. "Sally had been working part time the last few years because she was sick. She died 5 weeks ago." Before he could hang up, the operator said: "Wait a minute. Did you say your name was Paul?"

"Yes." "Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you. It says: 'When Paul calls, tell him that I still say: there are other worlds to sing in.' He will know what I mean." Paul thanked her and hung up and he did know what Sally meant.

The lectionary text today is from John 3:16 where Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the middle of the night and in

the course of the conversation asks Jesus what he means by saying that Nic must be born again. Rabbi Nicodemus is waiting to hear from Jesus a rule or law that must be strictly obeyed and then God will reward his faithfulness. This is the plight of the Jewish people that Paul addresses in our readings today in Romans 6 and 7.

As we look back on last week's sermon and readings, Paul says that there is only one God, and all people are separated from God because they follow another god...any other god that we have made ourselves. Paul defines this idolatry as sin. Paul also says that God gave the Law of Moses to the Jews to bring them back to God by pointing out sin. Yet the Law of Moses became a god that the Jews fashioned and molded in the image of god they set up for themselves. In

this way, the Law of Moses became the tool of sin to take Israel away from God even more.

Last week I said that in sin, we have no choices, we may want to do good with all the best intentions, but we cannot carry them out. Sin distorts our reality, and keeps us captive to our idols and addictions. Even when we think we are right...we end up being wrong. Take for instance Charlie Sheen, in his mind he is completely right, he knows all truth, and is justified in his behavior. But for the rest of us who couldn't help but see and hear his rants all over television and radio, we saw a sick man who is completely wrong. We see clearly how distorted Charlie's thoughts and reality is, even though he cannot see it. Paul says that it is the same for all of us. We are distorted by sin, our reality is so warped

by not being connected to the true and only God, so we believe with all sincerity that what we do is good and justified. Therefore, we have no choices except sin, and the response of God is to let sin ruin our reality more and more until we destroy everything, even ourselves.

Therefore, the only remedy that God has is to put our gods to death, even the law, so that sin's hold over us will finally be broken forever. When you are dead you see, sin and the law don't matter anymore. Death is the final judge of all that we are as humans. So God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son Jesus Christ to die and take our idolatry, our warped reality, the law and all our sin to the grave. Why Jesus? Well, Jesus was the only one who was worthy to take our sin and break its hold over us through his death on a



cross. Through the death of Christ, all creation has been set free from sin!

So since Christ has set us free from this warped reality of sin through his death, we must die in Christ by letting go of our past, letting go of our present and our future, and allowing a new person to be born in us by participating in Christ's resurrection and new life.

I love the Chrysalis movement in our church because it teaches our teenagers the way that leads to life: dying in Christ, rising in Christ, and flying with Christ. What does this look like? Paul uses an imagery of adult baptism in chapter 6 where people are immersed into a pool of water...dying in Christ...and then raised out of the water...rising in Christ

through his resurrection. This is what it means to be born of water and the Spirit as Jesus tells Nicodemus in John 3.

Now Paul goes on in chapter 6 and 7 to answer a question: If we can take the poison of sin and then take the antidote in Christ, why not have fun? Keep doing what you've always been doing, boys will be boys you know... and then when we feel like we've sinned too much, our life is getting dark and we cannot see any longer, we can just pop in the antidote of Christ's death and resurrection and presto chango!...we are back in God's good graces again. Many Christians fall into this temptation and into the clutches of sin again because of the freedom that Christ gives to us.

Paul says, "Are you nuts, why would you want to live a distorted life again?" Charlie Sheen, when you went through

rehab and got all of the drugs out of your system, why did you go back to drugs and alcohol and live that distorted life again? Are you nuts? The wages of drugs and alcohol is an early death from many causes. The wages of going back to sin and so-called "having fun" is death, no matter if we have been baptized or not.

The wages of living a life of freedom in Christ, righteousness, holiness, love of God and neighbor, in a community that loves you and you love them...is Life! More and more life! God wants us to have life and life abundantly, and since Christ will never die again, we too shall never die again when this mortal life is done. We will go from life to life! Isn't abundant, satisfying, peace and joy-filled life that goes on forever better than the temporary pleasures of this

warped world of sin that will die and never come back? Why would you ever want to go back to the idols we made again? How do we steer clear of sin and its siren song of death? That's where the Law is good, where morality and decency become a tool to help us as aids in our life in the Spirit and flying with Christ. This is where the spiritual disciplines of the Church come into play to help us remember the freedom we have in Christ and wake us up from the siren song that wants us to sleep in sin.

However, there is a danger, and the end of chapter 7 in Romans talks about how Paul the Pharisee got stuck in that miry clay of making the Law your hand-fashioned god. He looks back and sees his life as good, upstanding, and blameless under the law. He served his god of law, rules,

and morality well, even to the point where he killed followers of Jesus because they were enemies to his idol. You see, Paul like many others fell into the trap of sin when they made morality, decency, and laws and rules a god to worship and obey even to the point of eradicating those who are infidels. Who can rescue me from this body of sin and death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free and given you the proper perspective of rules and laws of God. They are aids only, the law of God, a decent life, a good life cannot save us from sin. It is only Christ through his death and resurrection who sets us free from a life of worshiping the human god of rules and decency and morality.

Whew! Well, there it is...Romans 6 and 7. Next week, we will talk about Romans 8 where Paul says that we can fly with Christ through a life in the Spirit.

But today, today let us focus on the gift of grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus and give thanks to God for the freedom Christ gives to you and me! Today as we celebrate Holy Communion, let us do so remembering his death for us, how Jesus took our sin and death to the grave, and through him we are born again, born to life abundant and eternal, born to sing in other worlds, the new creation of God.