

"The Mind of the Spirit"

Text: Romans 8:1-11

Grace be yours and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Does everyone here agree that we find ourselves in difficult times? War, abortion, pornography, human trafficking, an escalating drug epidemic, rampant government corruption, spiraling debt, gender disfunction – the list goes on and on. And all of this against the backdrop of our collective national morality, which seems to be growing ever more perverse.

And yet life for a child of God could not possibly hold greater promise or a brighter future.

It doesn't always feel that way, does it? Problems here in this vale of tears seem to just pile up from time to time – to the point that it even becomes difficult to keep a future as bright as ours in sight and in focus. We plod through the days as if we are losing, when in fact in Jesus Christ we have already won. It's like watching a recorded game (when you know your team won) and still getting upset and pessimistic about the outcome.

Our emotions do that to us. We hear the alarm in the voices of those who do not recognize that our Creator-God is absolutely in control of all things, and their pessimism and fear are contagious. We then allow temporal frustrations, failures, and setbacks to tarnish all that is good in our lives. What is even more ridiculous is that we allow the here and now to actually dull the crystalline promises of the hereafter. Our magnificent text for this morning will simply not allow such foolishness to stand, will not tolerate pessimism or gloom in the face of such a glorious and promising future, secured for us by our Savior-God.

The text that will, by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, realign, reenergize, and reassure us this morning is found in the 8th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

^{ESV} Romans 8:1-11 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned*

sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

This is God's Word. Our Creator-God desires to strengthen and comfort us through the study of these sacred words. That such gifts would indeed be ours, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Assuming you are familiar with that timeless classic, who was your favorite character on *The Andy Griffith Show*? If, by the way, anyone here says "Otis," please see me in the church office after the service.

The point with asking the question is that I can't imagine anyone who would pick *Barney Fife* – for a wide variety of reasons. No one wants to be a bi-polar, neurotic, woe-is-me Barney. Yet which character does our day-to-day outlook most resemble? Ol' Barn was forever convinced that *"the whole world is goin' to 'the bad place' in a hand basket"* – which is pretty much the attitude Christians will adopt if we focus always and only on the negative. Andy, on the other hand, would have met such pessimism with either a *"How ya figure, Barn?"* or *"Now wait just a cotton-pickin' minute."*

So which is it for you, optimism or pessimism? Hope or despair? Confidence or apprehension? Are things really as bad as they seem? Of course they are. And of course they're not. It depends on the object of your focus, doesn't it. Does our nation have moral, financial, and societal issues? Obviously, but when has that *not* been true? The fact remains that, even on a secular level, we are blessed to live in a land of tremendous freedom and opportunity. The fact that those freedoms

may be threatened does not mean we do not now have them. In fact we continue to enjoy a standard of living that is beyond the wildest dreams of our forefathers. As Christians we – *in particular* – need to stop and count our blessings.

The wise among us, those who have "been there, done that," will usually be the first to tell us that the problem is not so much reality as it is our dismal, dispirited perception of reality and fear of what might come next. You've probably all seen it before in others – or maybe in the mirror. For the most part our lives are filled only with "first world" woe and hardship. Can you imagine how God must react when he showers us with the fantastic news of sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life, when he offers us his Son's very body and blood – first on the cross and then in Holy Communion – and when he lavishes comfort, peace, and spiritual strength upon us, day by day and week after week, only to be rewarded with gloom, doom, and pessimism. I would not, of course, presume to speak for God, but it wouldn't be hard to imagine him asking us: *"Just what exactly would it take for you to recognize my love for you, and therefore the promise that the future most certainly holds?"*

What then do you think is the problem? How or why could it ever be that we hear words like the first verse of our text (**"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**) and still somehow harbor negative feelings like pessimism or dissatisfaction? Dig a bit into our text and we'll find our answers.

In our text we read the following: **"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit."** If you and I are routinely filled with gloom and pessimism, maybe it's because we are doing exactly what the godless do: **"setting our minds on the things of the flesh."** That means being too preoccupied with stuff. Earthly stuff. Stuff that doesn't really matter. Worse than that, it probably means that we are trying to fix a world that God's Word assures us is irreparably broken. If, in other words, we are expecting what our God has never promised – what he in fact told us *not* to expect – we will most certainly be not only disappointed but continually demoralized. The natural and tragic result is that that disappointment will overshadow and dull the eternally sublime promises that our God *has* made to us.

Have you ever been gently forced by someone – say your spouse or some other friend – to go shopping in a store that holds zero interest to you? The problem with walking into the storehouse of God's Word and finding nothing that interests or excites us has nothing to do with what God is

offering, does it? That only happens when we are in the market for all the wrong things. If you and I ever get the feeling that we just aren't getting what we wanted out of church or Bible study, it's time to check the shopping list to see if we have become focused on – preoccupied with – what our text describes as **"the things of the flesh."**

This is not just a minor issue, is it? Our text goes on to describe the basic problem: **"For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."** Far from frivolous, our text tells us plainly that being "worldly-minded" is a most serious spiritual condition.

Does that then mean that if I regularly drift off during most or all of the sermon, or if I find myself generally disinterested during a worship service or Bible study, I am really *an enemy of God*? Not necessarily, but it does mean that you have identified a very real and present danger in your life. It means your goals and priorities probably need attention.

Our text for this morning is just the ticket. Following up on that golden declaration (**"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"**) we are told not just of the dangers of being earthly-minded, but of the incredible story behind God's declaration that you and I no longer live under any sort of condemnation: **"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."**

Far from irrelevant, these words teach us things that we could never know on our own; things that we could never have guessed to be true but which we nonetheless *had to know* if we were to escape hell and inherit heaven. It is in fact the height of relevance to learn that my *natural* inclinations concerning how one gets to heaven are all wrong. There is in fact nothing more important in life than both to learn and to be reminded that the ticket for my admission to heaven cannot be earned by anything that I could ever do or say. That's what our text describes as **"the law of sin and death."** According to our text, God the Father **"sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh"** (that's

Christmas) and opened the doors of heaven for all sinners by punishing his Son in our place (that's Good Friday.) In other words, what we could never accomplish because of our sin, God did for us with his grace-based plan. We couldn't *earn* heaven, so God decided that his Son would earn it for us. He also then decided that he would give his Son's perfection to us free of charge. Free for us, that is. Jesus paid dearly.

These are things we could never know on our own, but these are the sorts of things that we are taught (or of which we are reminded) on virtually every page of God's Word, and at every worship service and Bible class based on that Word. The inevitable result of connecting daily with that Word of God is that not only is faith created and strengthened, our spirits are lifted, our work is clarified, our priorities are reset, and our resolve is strengthened.

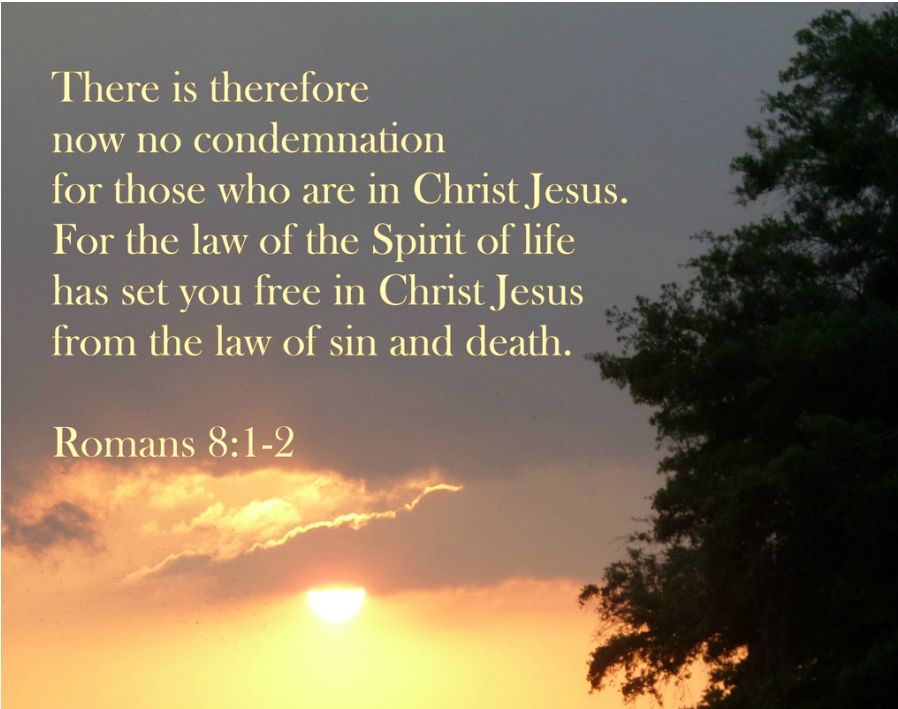
No one really needs to tell you that the world drains and demoralizes. The news is nearly always bad and the outlook is almost never good. Spend time on secular news channels and you will invariably be left with gloom and anxiety. Spend time in God's Word, however, and you will invariably be left with peace, joy, and confidence. To the world, everything is spinning wildly out of control. In God's Word we find different news – the *Good News* that the same God who loved us enough to send his Son is still in control, still sees all and knows all, and for whom nothing is impossible. There we learn of a God who cannot be fooled or outmaneuvered, for he sees the end of all things as clearly as the past and present. There we meet with a God who says to us, *"Stop. Take a deep breath. I've got this. I'm in control. I know where all this is going, and your future is infinitely better and brighter than you could ever now imagine."*

God help us to learn to look not at what we lack, nor at what bad things *might* happen sometime in the future, nor to be demoralized by the evil that surrounds us. We pray rather that he would grant us the grace and wisdom both to recognize and to thank our him for the blessings of the past and to trust him to care for us equally well in the days to come – reminding us always of the incredible things he has in store for all who are his. Amen.

ESV **Ezekiel 37:1-14** The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷ ¶ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ ¶ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

ESV **John 11:17-27** Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

ESV **Romans 8:1-11** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.



There is therefore
now no condemnation
for those who are in Christ Jesus.
For the law of the Spirit of life
has set you free in Christ Jesus
from the law of sin and death.

Romans 8:1-2

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The Fifth Sunday in Lent – March 26, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 18 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord We Come Before Thee Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Ezekiel 37:1-14) With picturesque and memorable images the Lord here teaches us that *physical* life (which comes from God) is not the same as *spiritual* life (which also comes from God alone). It is God alone who can grant life of any kind to mankind. He is the Lord of Life – both physical and spiritual, and we are to entrust both to him on a daily basis. We are also hereby reminded of just how hollow and pointless is physical life that is devoid of spiritual life.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 38 (Page 39)

The New Testament Lesson: (John 11:17-27) Our New Testament lesson contains one of the earliest and best testimonies concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. Martha correctly here labels Jesus as the Promised Savior. What is more, we are also here given clear testimony concerning the physical life that will be breathed back into these mortal bodies at the Resurrection of the dead. How we ought to long for that great day, working tirelessly until it arrives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 764 (Brown Hymnal)

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 8:1-11 (Printed on the back page)

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The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 310 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 798 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (36) Average (40) Wednesday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Final Midweek Lenten Service
	-8:15 pm.	– Board of Elders Meeting
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Palm Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Calvary of Marquette has applied for a seminary graduate. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday.

Holy Week Schedule – Our final Midweek Lenten service is scheduled for this Wednesday at 7pm. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week. Our commemoration also includes a Maundy Thursday communion service and a Good Friday service, both at 7pm. Easter Sunday begins with our annual Men's Breakfast, followed by our Easter service at 10am.

Board of Elders Meeting – The Board of Elders is scheduled to meet after the service this Wednesday.