

We bow our hearts in prayer: Good Father, heal our souls and our bodies in Christ Jesus. Amen.

In the Name of Jesus.

Dear fellow redeemed, who have died with Christ so that you may belong to Him.

Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry He performed many miracles of healing.

We heard of such a one in the Gospel text just a few moments ago.

On the surface, these miracles might look simply as a display of His almighty power.

But consider them a little more closely and you see a display of the Creator's love
as He entered into His creation and restored health to His corrupted world.

You can get a sense of how much joy each one of those healings brought to each one
of those individuals and their families in the reaction that we heard in the Gospel lesson.

What joy it must have also given our Lord to serve His people and see their joy!

But to restore only health in this world is not what Jesus came here for.

He came to give true and lasting healing, a healing that would endure even beyond death.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

Or do you not know, brothers – for I am speaking to those who know the law – that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? For a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have 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. For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. ^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen* ^(John 17:17)

This text reminds me of a story recorded in 1 Samuel, chapter 25.

We hear about a woman named Abigail. She was married to Nabal,
a man the Bible describes as a **harsh and badly behaved**.

We hear from those that knew him well that he was a **worthless** man and a **fool**.

And as the story unfolds, we see that these descriptions were not unwarranted.

While David had done a great kindness for him, he greedily refused to return any kindness
and instead insulted David, falsely accusing him of rebelling against King Saul.

We can consider what a burden being married to such a man might have been like.

While he should have been looking out for the benefit of his family and his neighbors,
he was selfish and cruel.

And one of his final and selfish acts threatened to hurt his entire family,

as David, sinfully, was going to take retribution against Nabal by killing his family.

Thankfully, the Lord kept David from this sin by giving Abigail the wisdom to talk David down from his murderous intent and extending him a gift for his men.

As it happened, Abigail dutifully returned home and reported to Nabal what she had done.

The Lord then took vengeance on Nabal so that **his heart died within him,** ⁽³⁷⁻³⁸⁾

and he became like a stone. And about ten days later the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.

After these things, David sent for Abigail and she became his wife.

Here is an example of what St. Paul was speaking of regarding the end of the law of marriage, and ultimately about the freedom that we have from the legalistic obedience to the law so that we are now free to be united with our Lord and serve Him in peace and joy.

While Abigail was married to Nabal, it was her duty to serve him and to look out for him.

It did not matter that he was a rascal and a fool.

But after he died, after the Lord killed him, she was freed from serving him.

She was free to marry another, without any violation or condemnation of the law.

Dear fellow Redeemed, this was our first husband, so to speak.

When you and I came into this world, we were scandalized by a harsh, wicked, worthless fool who only seeks to hurt you and keep you to himself.

The devil does not love you; he loves only himself and anything that would anger our Lord.

You are merely a pawn in the devil's game against the Triune God.

Though he may speak softly or seductively into your ear periodically, it is for your harm and for his own selfish gain.

But as St. Paul points out in our text, a death has taken place so that we are no longer bound to him, nor to his temptations to obey God's law hypocritically in mere outward displays of obedience.

He reminds us: **For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death.**

These sinful passions take on many forms. They can be as blatant as outright acts of defying God, or as subtle as acts of hypocrisy that look righteous, but are done w/o faith and for selfish gain.

You can go down through the 10 Commandments and consider your own offenses.

Who or what have you trusted in besides God to keep you safe or bring you joy?

How have you failed to pray to Him in your distresses, or praise Him for His deliverances?

How have you despised His Word and shown contempt for His Sacraments?

Have you honored His earthly representatives in obedience motivated completely by love?

Does love motivate and inspire your every action and word to your neighbors so that you: are constantly helping and befriending them?

are living a chaste and decent life, loving and honoring only your spouse or saving your love and honor entirely for your future spouse?

Does love motivate and inspire you to protect your neighbor's goods and treat him with utmost honesty?

Or to speak well of him and defend him as far as the truth will allow?

Does love for God and your neighbor keep you content with your own blessings,

so that you never craftily seek to gain his goods or tempt his workers away from him?

Every deviation from God's commandments, every loveless, faithless thought, even if not accompanied by a word or an action, bears fruit for death.

This means that even if it were to accomplish some great good and rescue the lives of 1,000s, if it is not done in fear and love of God, it deserves the wrath of God and eternal suffering. And to this you were bound, to serve your sinful passions and lusts.

You could do nothing otherwise. It looked like a life of servitude to the likes of Nabal.

But it is precisely these deviations, these sins, that Jesus has come to free you from.

He wanted a permanent, lasting...eternal solution to your bondage to your sinful nature.

And so Jesus came and betrothed Himself to you.

He took on your flesh and blood and walked among us, healing and restoring what corruption had taken away.

He came healing your relationship with His Father, performing God's commandments flawlessly, in fear and love and trust in His Father and in love for you.

But this was not enough. A death had to occur in order for the law to no longer bind you.

And so Jesus, taking on your loveless deeds, your faithless thoughts, your thankless words, was crucified and died.

Just as the Lord killed the worthless and harsh Nabal,

so He has put to death all your sins by putting them upon His Son, Jesus Christ.

Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ.

Just as a death of a husband releases the wife of her marital faithfulness to that husband, so the death of Christ releases you from being bound to **the wages of sin**, that is **death**.

Christ's death is your death. This connection is made very clear in Baptism as St. Paul wrote:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?^{Romans 6:3}

And as Abigail freely went from servitude under a wicked husband, to serving David as his wife, St. Paul continues, **Likewise... you also have 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.

This is not going from one task master to another. It is going from Nabal to David.

Going from the devil to Christ. Going from death to life.

From being despised and hated and forced to serve, to be loved and cared for and giving yourself willfully in service and obedience.

In freedom then the Lord has called us to **walk in newness of life**.

Not obeying the commandments of God because you must, for fear of punishment or death, but honoring Him with thankful hearts of fear and love and trust, overflowing in our thoughts, and words and actions to your neighbors and for their vocations, their bodies, their families, their goods, and their reputations.

Dear fellow redeemed, you have died with Christ so that you may belong to Him.

Be assured that the corruption of this life ends at death. It cannot follow you into eternity.

He has healed you so that what plagues you now will never plague you in the life to come.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria