

Sunday 23rd May 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Romans 6:1-23
Theme: “A new life in a new land”
“Remember who you are!”

Introduction:

We live in a “lucky country”.... We take so much for granted here: freedom, plenty of food to eat, luxuries, holidays, and so on.... In fact, I think that it’s only when you talk to people who have come from other countries, *where life had been pretty tough* to live in Australia that you begin to really appreciate how great it is to be a citizen of Australia....

As a Lutheran pastor, I have had a lot of opportunities in the past to talk with Germans, Poles, Hungarians, Latvians, Estonians, and the like, and I’ve heard many stories about life in the old country compared to life in the new country.

And in more recent times, I’ve spoken to many immigrants from Asian countries and Middle-Eastern countries who have had oppression and even persecution in the their old countries....

This morning, I want to talk about life in the new country.... No, I’m not going to talk about life in Australia.... I want to talk about life in God’s new country....

What am I talking about? Have a listen to Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of the start of Romans, chapter six, and I think you’ll understand...

So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we’ve left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn’t you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came out of the water, we entered the new country of grace – a new life in a new land! (p. 2041).

Part 1: Life in the old country

But before I talk about life in God's new country, and how great it is, let me talk a bit about life in the old country.... If you talk to post World War II emigrants, this is the one thing that they often want to talk about: the old country and how things were there.... And often *how bad things were there* compared to life in the new country.... In their old country, there was often a harsh government, whether it was Nazi or Communist, with harsh living conditions....

The old country that I want to talk about is about the same.... The old country of sin, guilt, and death is likewise a harsh place to live in. This is the realm that we would all be living in, if it wasn't for God's goodness to us....

Let's think a little about this realm, this "old country of sin" in terms of the way in which we usually talk about a land... When we talk about a country, we usually talk about things like its government, its way of life, its language, and its future. Let's do that with regard to the "old country of sin":

1. Its government

People who live in this country, this realm, are governed by themselves, and their own desires. They are "slaves of sin" as Paul puts it, echoing Jesus (*Rom. 6:6, 12, 13, 17, 20; cf. John 8:34*).

It might sound great to be governed by your own desires, and to do what you want to.... But it's not! The old country, the realm of sin, is not a good place to live in! As *you* do what you want to, you get hurt again and again, and as others do what *they* want to, you are bound to suffer at their hands. A country where all are slave to their own desires leads to anarchy and people being hurt left right and centre. It is hell....

2. Its way of life, its culture

All sorts of wicked behaviour can be seen in this land. In fact, one could say that its way of life is characterised by "impurity and wickedness" as Paul puts in our Bible reading (*Rom. 6:19*). Elsewhere Paul talks about some of the characteristics of this old country of sin. In this letter to the church at Galatia, he

writes about our basic sinful nature. He writes:

What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these... (Gal. 5:19-21).

That's the way of life in "the old country of sin".

It has a culture of sinfulness, coupled with guilt, and a feeling of lostness that comes from having no meaning or purpose in life....

3. Its language

The language of this country of sin is a language where the word "me" features again and again. If you listen to a citizen of this country talking, the words "me" and "my", and "I" and "mine" crop up again and again; and expressions like "I want..." and "I'm not getting the attention I deserve" and "I'm going to do this..." are part of parcel of the language.

4. Its future

The future of people who live in this "old country of sin" is summed up by Paul with one word: the word "death". Listen to what Paul says:

For the wages of sin is death... (Rom. 6:23; cf. vv. 20-21).

By death, Paul doesn't mean simply physical death, but also spiritual death, "the eternal death of separation from God in hell" (Stott, 185). Again and again in the Bible, in echo of Jesus' own words, this is the future that is spoken about for those who are slaves of sin. Jesus made it plain that the future of those who live in the old country of sin is eternal separation from God (Matt. 7:13-14, 21-22; 13:24-43; 25:31-46).

So that's the old country, the realm "where sin is sovereign", as Eugene Peterson puts it.... But the great news of God is that we don't need to live in the squalor of this old country, this old realm.

God offers us the chance to live “a new life in a new land”, so to speak (*Ibid.*). He has gone to enormous trouble to arrange our entry permits.

Often post World War II emigrants from Europe had to pay large amounts of money to get free: they had to bribe people before they could leave their land.... We don't have to pay, though, to get free. God has paid for our release from the old country by the suffering and death of His Son. Listen to what the Bible says:

- * **For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...** (*John 3:16*).

For you know what was paid to set you free from the worthless manner of life handed down by your ancestors. It was not something that can be destroyed, such as silver or gold; it was the costly sacrifice of Christ, who was like a lamb without defect or flaw (*1 Peter 1:18-19*).

God now offers to us our entry permit, *free of charge*. He's paid for them, and he hands them to us, *free of charge*. All we have to do is to take what God offers us, and to go and live in His new land, “the new country of grace” (*Ibid.*).

Part 2: Life in the new country

And what's life like in this new country, this new realm? Well, again let's look quickly at God's new realm in terms of things like its government, its way of life, its language, and its future....

1. Its government

People who live in this “kingdom of light” (*Col. 1:12,13*) are governed by God and His Spirit in them. They seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, God's Son. Paul writes in our text:

You have been set free from sin, and have become servants of God (*Rom. 6:22; cf. vv. 11,13,18*).

2. Its way of life, its culture

People who live in this new land have a new life, where love, mercy, and forgiveness are the way of life. All that is done is

done under the umbrella of God's "grace", his undeserved favour to us: we are set free to love, knowing that when we fail, God will forgive us for Jesus' sake.

Listen to some of the things that Paul says in our text about life in God's new land:

***In baptism, we leave the old country of sin and death and go to the new country where we can "live a new life" (v.4).**

***In God's new country, we are "no longer...the slaves of sin" (v. 6).**

***In God's new country, we "do not live under law, but under God's grace" (v. 14).**

3. Its language

People in God's new realm no longer speak the language of "me", but like Jesus, they speak the language of "you". Or to put it another way, they speak the language of love. The fruit of God's Spirit who lives in God's people is first and foremost "love" (*Gal. 5:22; 1 Cor. 13; cf. John 13:34-35*).

4. Its future

The future of those, who have taken an entry permit into God's new land and who live in that land under the umbrella of God's grace, is summed up by Paul in the words "eternal life"

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus, our Lord (*Rom. 6:23*). We will live with our Lord Jesus forever (*cf. John 3:16; Matt. 25:46; 1 Thess. 4; Rev. 7, 21*).

Well, what about you? Where are you living?

In our Bible reading for today, Paul assumes that His readers are people who are living in God's new land, his new realm, by virtue of their baptism into union with Jesus, and their faith in Jesus as their Saviour.

I know, though, that a pastor these days can't assume that, with regard to the people before him: those who come to church are made up of those who are God's people, those who are thinking

about taking the step of faith, those who searching for answers, and so on.... So let me first talk generally to any of you who haven't yet received God's free entry permit into His new land: *please take it in both hands and walk from the old to the new by the waters of baptism....*

If you are in God's new land, *as I assume most of us are*, let me just finish by focussing on one point: *live a citizens of God's new country*. Remember who you are. You are God's children, citizens of God's new country. So *live* as the people of God that you are.

The basic question that Paul is addressing in this chapter is the question: "Since I'm in God's new country where grace is sovereign, doesn't that mean that I can do what I like!?"

Doesn't that mean that I can sleep around, commit adultery, rip people off, say what I like to people, and so on!? After all, I'm living under the umbrella of God's grace! He'll forgive me if I do wrong" (*Rom. 6:1,15*).

Paul's answer is: "Certainly not!", "By no means!" "God forbid" (*Rom. 6:2,15*). Why? Because as Paul explains, we have left the realm of sin and are now in the realm of grace (*Rom. 6:2,14*). We are now the King's children, so how can we live as if we are something else.

Let me tell you a quick story. I hesitate to tell you this story, given the disrepute that the royals have fallen into of late, and not being a royalist at heart:

On 28 May 1972 the Duke of Windsor, the uncrowned King Edward VIII, died in Paris. The same evening, a television programme rehearsed the main events of his life.

Extracts from earlier films were shown, in which he answered questions about his upbringing, brief reign, and abdication. Recalling his boyhood as Prince of Wales, he said, 'My father (King George V) was a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes when I had done something wrong, he would admonish me saying, "My dear boy, you must always remember who you are"' (*John Stott, Romans, p.187*).

Conclusion:

John Stott finishes his comments on this section of Paul's letter to the church at Rome by saying:

It is my conviction that our heavenly Father says the same to us every day: 'My dear child, you must remember who you are' (*Ibid.*, p.188).

That's my conviction, too! Remember who you are! If you are baptised into union with Jesus, and if you are clinging to Jesus as your Saviour, you are God's child, a citizen of his new land, his new realm.

So live as his children! Live as citizens of His country: show compassion and mercy to those around you, just like Jesus, God's Son, did; love extravagantly like Jesus did in your life each day; and give generously as God's child to all who are in need....

And may the peace, which God gives, and which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen!