

July 12, 2026

Enough!

By Pr. Beate Chun

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the power of sin and death. For God has done what the code of law, weakened by our self-directed life, could not do: by sending his own Son into our human condition, vulnerable to sin, in order to deal with sin itself. This was done so that all that God commands might be fully accomplished in us, as our lives are directed not by our self-directed life, but by the Spirit.

For those whose lives are shaped by their self-directed life set their minds on the things of that life, but those whose lives are shaped by the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on earthly things is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. The earthly mind is opposed to God; it does not submit to God's way—indeed, it cannot—and those who are earthly minded cannot please God.

But you are not earthly minded; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. And even though your bodies are still marked by death because of sin, the Spirit is life because you have been justified. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Romans 8:1–11

Pastoral rendering by Pastor Beate Chun

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Welcome back to
another installment
of our summer sermon series
on Paul's letter to the Romans.

For several Sundays now
we have been reading
this remarkable letter,
and today we have arrived at chapter 8.

A Good Man

But before we dive into Romans,
I want to begin
with a story from the Gospel of Mark.

Once, as Jesus was setting out on a journey,
a man ran up,
knelt before him,
and asked,
"Good Teacher, what must I do
to inherit eternal life?"

Jesus answered,
"You know the commandments..."
And he listed them.

The man replied,
"Teacher, I have kept all these
since my youth."
Then comes one of my favorite lines
in all the Gospels.
Jesus looked at him and loved him.

Jesus saw his sincerity.
His devotion.
His faithfulness.

And he loved him.

Then Jesus said,
"You lack one thing.
Go. Sell what you own.
Give the money to the poor.
Then come, follow me."

The man was shocked.
He went away grieving,
because he had many possessions.

Let's sit with that story for a moment.
What a good man he is.
How devout.
How sincere.
How faithful.

Jesus sees all of it.
And he loves him.
Yet even this good man
discovers the limits
of his own goodness.

What If?

Now let me imagine
a different ending.
The Gospel never tells us
what became of this man.
So just for today, let's imagine
his story continued.
Suppose he really did it.
He sold everything.
It took time.
His house.
His furniture.
His jewelry.
His artwork.

Even his beloved horse.
Finally,
he had done it.
Everything Jesus had asked.

Then he went looking for Jesus.
But Jesus was no longer there.
Jesus had been crucified.
So he searched for the followers of Jesus.
And one day,
in my imagination,
he met the apostle Paul.

He proudly told Paul
everything he had done.
And Paul listened.
Then Paul said something
completely unexpected.

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.
If I understand all mysteries
and all knowledge...
If I have faith that can move mountains...
If I give away everything I own...
but do not have love,
I gain nothing."

In other words,
Paul says,
"So... you sold everything?
That is remarkable.
But tell me—
did you do it out of love?"
"No."
"Then,
you have missed

the point."

Poor Jacob!

Can you imagine
the look on this poor man's face?
Let's give this man a name.
Let's call him Jacob.
Poor Jacob.

Jacob just can't catch a break.
No matter how hard he tries.
No matter how sincere he is.
No matter how faithfully
he gives his best.
There always seems to be
one more thing.

Which is a frightening thought.
Because honestly,
who among us
has ever tried half as hard
as Jacob?
If Jacob cannot make the cut,
where does that
leave us?

That is exactly the question
Paul is wrestling with
in Romans.

The Question Changes

Jacob begins
with a question.
"What must I do?"
It is a good question.
An honest question.
It may even be the question

most religious people ask.

What must I do to be a better Christian?

What must I do to please God?

What must I do to inherit eternal life?

The problem is,
if we begin there,
we end up on a hamster wheel.
Because we never know
when we have done enough.

And to make matters worse,
we cannot even be sure
that our best intentions
will always lead
to good outcomes.

Paul knew this from experience.
Before he met Christ,
he sincerely believed
he was serving God.
His zeal was genuine.
And yet, that zeal
caused enormous suffering.

Then something happened.
Paul encountered the risen Christ.
And everything changed.
Paul no longer began
with the question,
"What must I do?"

Instead, he began
with another question.
"What has God
already done?"

The Good News

Listen again
to how our reading begins:
"There is therefore now
no condemnation for those who are
in Christ Jesus."

Notice that Paul does not begin
with a command.
He does not give us
another task.
He does not hand the Jacobs of this world
another assignment.

He begins with a declaration.
God has acted.
God has entered our human condition.
God has broken the power
of sin and death.
God has raised Christ
from the dead.
God has given us
the Holy Spirit.

This shifts the center of gravity.
Now we live in Christ.
The center is no longer ourselves
and our endless striving.

The center is Christ,
who lives in us
through the Holy Spirit
and shapes our lives,
our days, our decisions,
our relationships.

An Invitation

Because of that,
our lives no longer have
to be shaped by fear,
or by guilt, or by the hamster wheel
of endless striving.

Paul's invitation
to the Christians in Rome,
to the Jacobs of this world
and to us,
is not to try harder.

It is to make room
for God's Spirit.
To let God do in us
what we could never accomplish
by ourselves.

To let God's love take root in us,
grow within us,
and overflow
into the lives
of those around us.

For the life of a Christian
does not begin with the question,
"What must I do?"

It begins with the good news
of what God
has already done.
Thanks be to God.

Amen.

Sermon for Sunday, July 12, 2026 - Pentecost 7

Presented at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church San Francisco

The sixth in a series of Sermons on the Letter to the Romans.

Tags: Romans 8 | Paradigm shifts |