

## Homily

12 Sunday after Trinity

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presented by John Watson, Lay Reader

Last Sunday, Deacon Chris talked about the foundation of our faith as described in First Corinthians. In his mid week reminder, he calls on us to take action and to be faithful witnesses. Today we look at our individual choices, our free will.

Proverbs 16:9 says

***A man's heart deviseth his way,***

***But the Lord directeth his steps.***

Is there such a thing as free will?

It seems that how this question affects our responsibility is always on our minds.

So often in life we assert one of two things, sometimes even in the same sentence; To try and excuse behavior we suspect might be wrong.

On one hand we try to say that God has given us the right and ability to make up our own minds as to what is right and wrong.

That there is no real absolute standard to live by.

This is why schools no longer teach morality but instead practice “values” education.

They help each student decide for himself what his own “values” are.

Absolute Free will asserts that even God has no right to decide for us.

On the other side there is a notion that everything is pre determined.

I am what I am and I do what I do, and I can't help my actions because that is my nature.

It comes down to either:

"Well it is the way God made me" or

"The devil made me do it"

In this instance there is no free will.

As people we tend to believe both of these assumptions at once but today's lessons hit the question head on.

The writer of Ecclesiasticus tells us:

Do not say "God made it too hard and that is why I strayed."

If we love HIM, we will hate what He hates and not want to commit sin.

Also do not say, "It's His fault I failed."

There is no place for sin in his presence. God does not need it or want it.

*"He himself made man from the beginning and left him in the hand of his counsel"*

In other words , He made us so that we could live according to His will.

*To keep His commandments and to perform acceptable faithfulness.*

*In Ecclesiasticus 15 verse 16*

We are given the choice between fire and water.

We can stick our hand into either....

Which one is better? Which one would you choose?

*For the wisdom of the Lord is great and he is mighty in power.*

*and beholdeth all things:*

*and His eyes are upon them that fear him*

*and he knoweth every work of man*

*He hath commanded no man to do wickedly*

*Neither hath he given any man license to sin.*

We are both expected and commanded to do His will and to follow His commandments.

To avoid sin and to show mercy to all of mankind

He has given no one permission to sin.

So we ask ourselves.....

Why can't I always do the right thing?

Why do I keep sinning?

Call it original sin. Maybe it is because we are weak.

We do not seem to be able to use our free will in the way God intends.

Why do we so often choose the wrong path and feel as though we can't help it?

Why do we feel guilty?

The answer is because God, working in us, tells us we have erred.

Listen to what St. Paul said,

*“Wherefore, my beloved as ye have always obeyed.*

*Not as in my presence only but now much more in my absence. “*

Paul was saying that the church was doing pretty much what God wanted and St. Paul was commending them for it.

The Philippians must have been a good church to be a part of.

But even to them he gave demanding advice:

*“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

We all have a major responsibility to get it right no matter how difficult it might be.

It is also obvious that the level of difficulty is more than any of us can handle.

We consistently fall short, over and over again.

But we can grow in grace. We can come closer to our eventual goal.

*“For it is God which worketh in you*

*Both to will and to do of his good pleasure. “*

That is the key to salvation.

We have complete responsibility for our actions.

We do sin and offend the holiness of God.

Our struggle sometimes seems hopeless but God doesn't want it to be like that.

By the sacrifice of the Holy Cross!

By the infilling of the Holy Spirit!

He restores Free will to all of us.

He makes us aware of His will.

He causes us to know when we have strayed, to feel guilty, and to seek his forgiveness and His cleansing power.

Original sin has taken our free will from us but God restores it.

He gives us the ability to choose and He calls us to do the right thing.

We are reminded of this in our second lesson...

*"That we may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom we can shine as lights in the world;*

*Holding forth the word of life. "*

Let us pray:

Search me, O god and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

See if there be any wicked way in me

Lead me in the way everlasting that I may show forth the wonders of thy grace, in this fallen world.

By the mercies of the cross of Jesus Christ my savior,

Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost

One God, world without end. Amen

