

Lent 5                    3/22/2026  
Romans 8:1-11 A

***THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.***

The book *Unbroken* tells the story of Louis Zamparini. Louie was a distance runner in the 1936 Olympic games, and it was thought that he might be the first man to break the 4-minute mark in the mile run. When World War II broke out, he became a bombardier on a B-24. After his airplane crashed, he floated in a raft for 47 days in the Pacific Ocean, before being captured by the Japanese. For the next 2 ½ years, he was a POW. Any POW of the Japanese endured horrible conditions, but Louie, with his fame as an Olympian, was singled-out for especially barbaric treatment, particularly by one sadistic guard.

At the end of the war, he was set free and returned home to California. He soon realized, however, that even though he free -- back in the states -- he was still imprisoned by Japan.

My Friends, in our lesson today, Paul talks about being a slave, a prisoner, to shame, guilt, criticism, our fear of death and hell. *There is therefore 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.*

*The law if the Spirit of life as set you free in Christ Jesus.* “Free in Christ Jesus?” So let me ask you – do you feel free? Maybe I should ask you the question this way: How free do you feel?

The honest answer is that it’s pretty easy to feel condemned. And the reason for that is simple -- we live in a world of condemnation.

Take, for example, that most intimate structure known to mankind -- the family. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. And yet, how often the home becomes an environment of condemnation. The bride hears from her God-given head, "Why is this house such a mess? Can't you cook anything? Can't you do anything right!"

And the wife bits back, "You never show me any affection. You never spend any time with the kids. You never do anything around here. You're never home anyway."

Even children hear constant criticism. The teenager hears, "Your room is a mess. That music is horrible. Why are you wearing that? Your grades are terrible. When I was your age...! When are you going to grow up?" And, parents hear from their teenagers, "You're too strict. Everybody else's parents say its ok. You just don't understand."

Even the smallest of children hears, "Look at the mess you've made. You're such a little brat."

My Friends, this is not discipline to correct sinful behavior. This is harsh judgment. Condemnation.

And, we're awfully good at condemning ourselves. Paul writes in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans, *Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold (12:2, Philips)*. But we do. We do let the world squeeze us into its mold. You were in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade – maybe even the 2<sup>nd</sup> – when you know dad didn't love you. Those awkward, hard high school years are spent wearing the right brand of jeans and shoes, trying to answer the question, "Do they like me?"

Even into our adult years, it doesn't get much better.

I once happen to run into a girl that I had gone to high school with. I digress slightly to say that my high school was big enough that you had

your own circle of friends, you hung out with. But, it was small enough that you were bound to cross paths with everyone at some point, in an activity or class together. So, I knew her, but honestly, I don't recall every having a conversation with her. We started chanting, exchanging pleasantries, when she asked me if I came home much. Dad was still living at the time, the boys were younger, so, yah, we did. And she just started this diatribe about how much she hated coming home because she felt everyone was still looking down their nose at her. Yes, she was in trouble and had a child out of wedlock at a tender age. I found myself wanting to say, that was like 25 years ago. And besides, what does their opinion matter, anyway?

There was once a man who had not seen his father for many years -- decades in fact -- but he did come home for his dad's funeral, just so that he could spit -- **literally spit** -- on his father's casket at the graveside committal service. His father's condemnation did not come merely in mean, cruel words, but beatings and bruises. You want to talk about being imprisoned? Not feeling free?

And then we have that great accuser. "Satan" means "accuser" and the book of Revelation tells us, [he] accuses "them day and night" (12:10). You don't need me to tell you that, do you? Peter denied his Lord, and wept bitter tears. You know those tears, don't you? The Psalmist says, *There is no health in my bones because of my sin (38:3)*. Your bones have hurt to their very marrow because of the condemnation of sin, **haven't they?**

But take heart and be of good cheer, My Friends! There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

What a precious gift we have in Jesus! And how blessed we are to hear the Savior's words, *For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world (Jn 3:17)*. God did not send His Son into the world to

condemn, to scold, to rebuke, to criticize, to chastise, to show us how bad we are; He came to save. We may receive condemnation at work, from family, certainly from our enemies, condemn ourselves, but Jesus, who came to save us, gives us only comfort and love.

I say that to you, My Friends, because the very Son of God became a man so that He could be condemned for you, in your place. He took all of your sins upon Himself, every single sin of thought, word, and deed. And, the very Son of God was lifted up on the cross for those sins and died for you, enduring your punishment, suffering your death, taking God's anger at your sin upon His own body, so that you would be forgiven. *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1).*

No death. No hell. No power of Satan to accuse you of anything. No condemnation.

In our lesson, Paul teaches us that we have been set free FROM a life in the flesh, and set free FOR a life in the Spirit.

I mentioned Louis Zamparini. His life is an amazing story of how God's grace works in our lives. Yes, even after he returned, he was still imprisoned by Japan. Then, his wife convinced him to attend a Billy Graham crusade, where he heard the saving Gospel. And that Gospel created faith in him, so that he becomes a new creation in Christ. He was **free!** He was able to forget what lied behind and he was able to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (cf. Ph 3:14-15). He became an ambassador for Christ. He founded a Christian camp for troubled young men. He even traveled back to Japan to personally forgive his Japanese guards.

Yes, we live in a world of condemnation, so we don't always feel free. But, you – you have Jesus. You are baptized and live in Christ. At our

Lord's Baptism, the Father spoke from heaven of His Son, "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased*" (Mt 3:17). Those are God's words of you, "This is my beloved Son, Daughter, with whom I am well pleased!" That is how God sees you.

And Jesus says this of you, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*" (Mt 5:7). You know how we close our worship services here at Concordia. In our worship, we receive mercy, that we may be merciful to our neighbors. God brings into your life those imprisoned by the world, themselves, most certainly by the ugly accusations of Satan so that you can share with them the Good News of the Gospel, and building them up and edifying with the strength, joy, and peace and the **FREEDOM** that only the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ can give.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.