The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost, Daniel Tate  
**Jeremiah 28:5-9, Psalm 89:1-4,15-18, Romans 6:12-23, Matthew 10:40-42**

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” There is a lot in our epistle about slavery and freedom. Slavery to passions, impurities, iniquity, wickedness, and sin. Sin is rebellion against God, or absence from God. Sin separates us from God and others. It separates us from community and intimacy. Freedom is slavery or obedience to God.   
 Our passage in Romans reminds me of a 1952 movie Ikiru, by Japanese director Akira Kurosawa. Ikiru means To Live. The movie shows a man who has been working for 30 years as a government administrator. During that thirty years he has been a manager of an office that never actually gets anything done. Day after day, year after year, he has been part of a system that rubber stamps the postponing of projects and passes responsibility of those projects to other agencies. The main purpose of these workers has been not to get projects done for the people, but for preserving their jobs. Each man is for himself, protects his own job, and competes with the others around him, waiting for the guy above him to die so that he that can have that job. Each person puts their time in waiting to retire with the best possible pension. He is part of a system of waste, and he has been a cog in perpetuating that system. He is wage slave.   
 The problem for this man is that he has begun to get pain in his stomach. He can barely eat anymore. He goes to the doctor to find out what it is, but no one will tell him. But he knows what it is. Cancer. The people in the hospital try to keep him in denial. Everyone in the story is in denial. Denying that they are accomplishing nothing, and denying that their own deaths will come. But pain and fear and desperation are waking this man up.  
 He figures out that he only has about 6 months to live and he is in despair. He has been isolated and lonely for a long time but has become numb to it. His main goal he has told himself is, that he is working so he can leave his inheritance to his son, who with his daughter-in-law lives with him in the upstairs apartment of his house. His wife died many years ago and he raised his son by himself. But most of the time he worked, and he missed spending time with the boy over the years, so he and the son have become estranged.   
 The man stops going to work. He hadn’t missed a day of work in 30 years, but now he stops going in. He wanders for days and eventually runs into a young woman who used to work in his office, but quit because she knew the place for what it was, a corrupt system. Her personality, her natural exuberance, her upbeat outlook, her curiosity, seems to have made her immune. He follows her around, trying to talk to her, trying to find out what her secret is. He sees his life as having been a waste, and now he is about to die. He has been living a living death, and now he’s really going to die. He realizes that his life has had no meaning. She is the only person he knows who can take the truth, who doesn’t deny reality. She is willing to hear his story, his fear, even though it is painful to her and to him. She doesn’t run away. His son won’t talk to him.   
 Finally, through his talking to her he has an epiphany, he knows what he has to do. It’s not too late. He goes back to his office. Everyone clamors around him wondering where he has been, but he ignores them and goes to his desk and takes the first project file on this great big pile of other projects that haven’t gotten done, and declares that this is the project that has to get done. It’s to make a park for kids and their families in the inner city on land that is undeveloped and has been used as a toxic dumping ground. He runs into many obstacles from every person and agency, but he has no pride, he begs, he deals, trades, he does anything he has to, to make this project a success. When someone asks him how he can take it, the way people are treating him as he tries to get this project done, he says, “I have no time for hate.” Day after day, he drags his failing body around from department to department to get the project done. Nothing stops him, and in the end, he dies happy, having completed it. It wasn’t too late; he made his life have purpose. His last actions made it so none of his life was a waste. The epiphany the man had, the brief friendship he had with the young woman is an example of God’s grace that Paul refers to in today’s reading. Grace is free. It is part of the freedom that God offers us if we pay attention, and act on it.   
 Paul says, “Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies.” Every day, we have a choice. To live or to die. The world we live in now, is full of systems just like the man in Ikiru was trapped in, that want to claim our time, that can subjugate us. We sin without even trying. We are immersed in it.   
 Paul asks us what we are slaves to? Are we slaves to sin? To systems of oppression? To addiction? To work? To material possessions? Am I a slave to my past, believing that I cannot change? Do I believe that it’s all too hard? Or, am I passive, stuck in inertia, going with the flow of, “this is how things have always been done,” thinking it’s too difficult to break out, stuck in a habitual groove?   
 Or, are we slaves to righteousness, obedient to God, enslaved to God? We are free when enslaved to God. We can’t do it alone. This conflict we have between these two tendencies, these two forces. How can we break free and stay in freedom? We do it with God’s help. The Baptismal Covenant in our Book of Common Prayer addresses this clearly. Continue in fellowship, breaking bread, prayer, repenting when we fall into sin, proclaim the word, love our neighbor as ourselves, and strive for justice and peace. We are limited, we need to continually ask for God’s help.   
 We are living in hard times. The worst global pandemic in a century, the worst economy since the great depression, the protests after the George Floyd murder, symbolizing, bringing to our awareness, continued systemic racism. But the times are harder for some, more than it is for others. What can those of us who are not suffering as much, do, to make a break in systems of oppression? What can we do to make our lives meaningful, to really live?   
 We can find a purpose. Our gospel reading is a continuation of the gospel reading we had two weeks ago. Jesus gave his disciples a mission, “Go, proclaim the Good News, cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. If your blessing of peace is not accepted, accept it back as a blessing to yourself. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town” (Matthew 10:4-14). Have no time for hate. And today, “whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes God.” The same with prophets, and the righteous. We can imitate Jesus’ own mission statement. “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, release the captives, give sight to the blind, and to free the oppressed” (Luke 4:18-19).   
 To wake up, we can read the prophets of old, and we can listen to and support the prophets of today. Two years ago, William Barber II restarted Martin Luther King’s Poor People’s Campaign. On June 20th, a little over a week ago, he held a national virtual campaign demanding, among other things, equal treatment and accessible housing, health care, public transportation, and sustainable income and services for people with disabilities. There are 140 million people who are poor or low-income in the United States today.   
 We can educate ourselves. We can listen to Martin Luther King’s sermons for inspiration and motivation. We can listen to the 1619 podcasts put out by the NY Times that does an in-depth history of slavery in this country. 1619 is when the first African slaves arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. We can follow our local Black Lives Matter chapter. We can write to our state legislators to support reducing mandatory minimum sentences. These are just a few things.   
 Let us not be slaves to sin, indifferent to the sufferings of our fellows. Let us not be separate from God. With God’s help, let us be one of the righteous.   
 In Deuteronomy, God through Moses says, “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying, and holding fast to God (Deuteronomy 30: 15, 19-20).