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David and Nabal. No longer slaves to sin.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Samuel 25 Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him, and they buried him in his house at Ramah. Then David rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. And there was a man in Maon, whose business was in Carmel.

The man was very rich, he had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. He was shearing his sheep in Carmel. Now the name of the man was Nabal, and the name of his wife Abigail.

The woman was discerning and beautiful, but the man was harsh and badly behaved. He was a Calebite. David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep.

So David sent ten young men. And David said to the young men, Go up to Carmel and go to Nabal and greet him in my name, and thus you shall greet him. Peace be to you, and peace be to your house, and peace be to all that you have.

I hear that you have shearers. Now your shepherds have been with us, and we did them no harm, and they miss nothing all the time they were in Carmel. Ask your young men, and they will tell you.

Therefore let my young men find favour in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever you have at hand to your servants and to your son David. When David's young men came, they said all this to Nabal in the name of David, and then they waited.

And Nabal answered David's servants, Who is David? Who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants these days who are breaking away from their masters. Shall I take my bread and my water and my meat that I have killed for my shearers, and give it to men who come from I do not know where? So David's young men turned away and came back and told him all this. And David said to his men, Every man strap on his sword.

And every man of them strapped on his sword. David also strapped on his sword. And about four hundred men went up after David, while two hundred remained with the baggage.

But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, Behold, David sent messengers out of the wilderness to greet our master, and he railed at them. Yet the men were very good to us, and we suffered no harm, and we did not miss anything when we were in the fields, as long as we went with them. They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the while we were with them keeping the sheep.

Now therefore know this, and consider what you should do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his house, and he is such a worthless man that one cannot speak to him. Then Abigail made haste and took two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared, and five seers of parched grain, and a hundred clusters of raisins and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on donkeys. And she said to her young man, Go on before me, behold, I come after you.

But she did not tell her husband Nabal. And as she rode on the donkey and came down under cover of the mountain, behold David and his men came down toward her, and she met them. Now David had said, Surely in vain have I guarded all that this fellow has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him, and he has returned me evil for good.

God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him. When Abigail saw David, she hurried and got down from the donkey, and fell before David on her face and bowed to the ground. She fell at his feet and said, On me alone, my lord, be the guilt.

Please let your servant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your servant. Let not my lord regard this worthless fellow Nabal, for as his name is, so is he. Nabal is his

name, and folly is with him.

But I your servant did not see the young men of my lord, whom you sent. Now then, my lord, as the lord lives, and as your soul lives, because the lord has restrained you from blood guilt, and from saving with your own hand, now then let your enemies and those who seek to do evil to my lord be as Nabal. And now let this present that your servant has brought to my lord be given to the young men who follow my lord.

Please forgive the trespass of your servant, for the lord will certainly make my lord a sure house, because my lord is fighting the battles of the lord, and evil shall not be found in you so long as you live. If men rise up to pursue you, and to seek your life, the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living, in the care of the lord your God. And the lives of your enemies he shall sling out as from the hollow of a sling.

And when the lord has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you, and has appointed you prince over Israel, my lord shall have no cause of grief or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause, or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the lord has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant. And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the lord, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me.

Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you who have kept me this day from blood guilt, and from working salvation with my own hand. For as surely as the lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has restrained me from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, truly by morning there had not been left to Nabal so much as one male. Then David received from her hand what she had brought him.

And he said to her, Go up in peace to your house. See, I have obeyed your voice, and I have granted your petition. And Abigail came to Nabal, and behold he was holding a feast in his house, like the feast of a king.

And Nabal's heart was merry within him, but he was very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until the morning light. In the morning when the wine had gone out of Nabal, his wife told him these things, and his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

And about ten days later the lord struck Nabal, and he died. When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, Blessed be the lord who has avenged the insult I received at the hand of Nabal, and has kept back his servant from wrongdoing. The lord has returned the evil of Nabal on his own head.

Then David sent and spoke to Abigail to take her as his wife. When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they said to her, David has sent us to you to take you to him as his wife. And she rose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, Behold your handmaid is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.

And Abigail hurried and rose and mounted a donkey, and her five young women attended her. She followed the messengers of David, and became his wife. David also took Ahinoam of Jezreel, and both of them became his wives.

Saul had given Michael his daughter, David's wife, to Palti the son of Laish, who was of Galen. 1 Samuel chapter 25 opens with the death of Samuel. The father figure has now died, but the rivalry of the two sons has not ended.

It's very easy to read this chapter as if it were merely the latest standalone episode in the continuing adventures of David, not considering how it ties in with the larger picture. The first thing to notice on that front is that this is the middle of three stories in succession of David drawing back from vengeance. Two times with Saul, and this time with Nabal, David comes the closest to executing vengeance for himself in this chapter.

He is on his way to destroy Nabal and his men when the wise Abigail intercepts him. Why of all the events that occurred during David's time in the wilderness has this one been recorded for us? Perhaps it's because there is an association between Nabal and Saul. The characterisation of Nabal is important.

He is described as exceptionally rich. He feasts like a king in verse 36. He has three thousand sheep.

Saul in the preceding and the following chapter comes with three thousand chosen men. In verse 36 he feasts like a king. However, he is characterised as a fool.

His name means fool and he is also described as such by his servants and his wife. David acts faithfully on behalf of Nabal, as he did for Saul, but is thanklessly mistreated by him. Both men return evil for David's good.

There are further things we should notice as we look more closely at this passage. David cares for Nabal's flocks, much as Jacob cared for Laban's flocks. Much like Laban, however, Nabal is an ungracious man.

He treats David unjustly, even though he has helped him to build up his house. The association between Laban and Nabal can also be seen in their names. Nabal, in Hebrew as in English, is Laban backwards.

The events occur at the time of sheep shearing and Nabal speaks of servants who break away from their masters. Jacob's flight from Laban was at the time of sheep shearing. In David and Nabal we see a pairing that reminds us of Jacob and Laban.

However, we've also seen another character in the story who reminds us of Laban, and that is Saul. Saul is like Laban in the way that he tricks his son-in-law concerning his daughters. Saul, like Laban, is deceived by his daughter with therapheme.

Saul takes on the characteristics of Laban, the wicked father-in-law. All of this invites us to read the story of David and Nabal as a commentary on the story of David and Saul, and a commentary on that story in terms of the parallels between David and Jacob, and Saul and Laban. But there is a twist in this particular story.

If we remember the story of Jacob fleeing from Laban after he finally settles matters with Laban and moves on, he faces another threat coming towards him, Esau with his 400 men. Esau is there seeking vengeance. He has lost the birthright and the blessing to his brother Jacob, and now it seems that he is finally going to get his own back.

However, Jacob sends on a wave of gifts ahead of him to Esau to pacify him. Returning to 1 Samuel chapter 25 in the light of this background, we notice something surprising. David, who seemed like Jacob at the beginning of the story, Jacob who was thanklessly treated by the Laban character, Jacob who broke away from his master at the time of sheep-shearing, David as Jacob now turns into David as Esau.

David like Esau comes with 400 men to get vengeance for himself. In reading the story of David in the books of Samuel, we need to notice this background in the story of Genesis, the story of Jacob, Esau and Laban, and the way that the characters play off each other. There is no simple this equals that association between the characters of Genesis and the characters of Samuel.

Rather, we see the characters in the book of Samuel taking on features and traits of various characters from the story of Genesis. So at certain points, Saul is like Isaac. He's the father who will not give the blessing to the right son.

He's the father figure in the darkness. He's also like Laban, as we have seen. Saul is perhaps most powerfully associated with the character of Esau.

Esau. He's the one who despises the blessing and the birthright. He's the one who tries to kill his brother.

In certain episodes, we also see more specific associations, such as his lifting up his voice and weeping, as Esau did when he lost the blessing. Jonathan, for his part, is also like Esau, but Esau who reconciled with his brother and made peace with him. David throughout is most typically Jacob.

But yet at other points, we see him take on the characteristics of Esau, both positive and negative. Like Esau, he is described as ruddy. He's a man of the field, a man who's gifted in battle, a man who's integrated many of the traits and gifts of Esau, the brother of Jacob, bringing together those two characters in a positive way.

However, there is an ambivalence to that character, the character of Esau. And here in this chapter, we see some of that. The vengeance of Esau is expressed in David's attempt to execute vengeance for himself against Nabal.

And what happens? There's an interception. And the interception is provided by Abigail. Abigail is this wise woman, her wisdom contrasting with the folly of her husband, whose name means foolish.

In this story, she plays the part of Jacob. She is the one who sends the waves of gifts ahead and restores David to his Jacobness. There are other things going on in the story.

It's an artfully told narrative. There are several occasions in the story of Jacob and of Judah, his son and his ancestors that involve the time of sheep shearing and that involves some dimension of the verb *parats*. The first occurs in Genesis chapter 30, where Jacob's property increases greatly during his time with Laban.

Jacob then leaves Laban at the time of sheep shearing. A few chapters later, the story of Judah and Tamar involve sheep shearing again. It's at the time of sheep shearing that Judah has his relations with Tamar.

And then later on in the story, the verb *parats* occurs in the context of the breaking through of Perez, who receives his name on account of that verb. Beyond the story in 1 Samuel 25, the story of 2 Samuel chapter 13, with Absalom and Tamar, involves Absalom pressing David to attend a festival at the time of sheep shearing, once again using the verb *parats*. This particular set of associations is something pointed out by Jeffrey Gagan.

It suggests that in this story, associated with the other stories, we're seeing something of the destiny of Jacob and Judah, his son, playing itself out. The characterisation of Nabal is important in other ways. He is a fool.

He's also described in a way that associates him with dogs. He is a Calebite. Caleb means dog.

David talks about killing all of those who piss against the wall, like a dog does. It's translated in most translations as male, but the euphemism is not accidentally or arbitrarily chosen. As Peter Lightheart has noted in an article, Nabal and his wine, Abigail relays the news to Nabal as the wine is going out of him, suggesting that he is in the process of urinating.

In the preceding chapter, David cut off a corner of Saul's robe while he was covering his feet, another euphemism for defecating. We should be alert to such parallels. In seeking to destroy the foolish Nabal, the man like Laban, the man like Saul, David becomes at risk of losing himself, of giving in to some dark shadow side of his personality, the Esau side that would reduce him to a vengeful warlord.

From Genesis 35-6 onwards, subtle associations between Benjamin and Esau have been explored at many points, and we see these come to their head in the character of Saul, who takes, as we have noticed, Esau-like characteristics on many occasions. David,

however, is not immune to these things. He could also become like his enemy.

In opposing Saul, Esau, he could become like both Esau and Saul. This is, of course, one of the great dangers of vengeance. In vengeance, we can easily become the twin of the person we are seeking vengeance against.

We mirror them, we become like them, just as David almost becomes a Saul or Esau-like character here. It requires a Jacob-like character, Abigail, the wise woman, to bring David back to his Jacobness, back to his senses, back to his true destiny in calling and identity. And had it not been for Abigail, David would have had blood guilt upon his hands.

His attempt to seek vengeance against Nabal is, in the context, associated with the temptation to take vengeance upon Saul, and in the process to become like Saul himself. Had David obtained his throne through violence and vengeance against his predecessor Saul, his kingdom would have been compromised at the very foundation. Abigail's actions here, in drawing David back from the brink, need then to be read in terms of the larger story, in terms of what is happening between David and Saul.

David must not try to work salvation for himself, the Lord will do so for him. And in the destruction of the fearful fool Nabal, we have a foreshadowing of what will happen with Saul. And the symbolism could be extended.

After the death of Nabal, the wife of Nabal becomes the wife of David. When Saul, the bridegroom of Israel, dies, it will be David who becomes the husband of the nation. Of course, there is another level on which we should read this story.

We should observe that David is falling into the trap of polygamy, something that will cause him and his son great trouble in the future. A question to consider, reflecting upon the counsel of Abigail to David, how would the character of David's kingdom have changed had he taken vengeance upon Nabal and Saul? Romans chapter 6 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him, in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.

Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again. Death no longer has dominion over him.

For the death he died, he died to sin, once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law, but under grace.

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law, but under grace? By no means. Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.

For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But now that you have been set free from sin, and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification, and its end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6 begins with the question of how we are to respond to the abounding of grace in the place where sin abounded, a point that Paul made at the end of chapter 5. If the blackness of human sin occasions the most dazzling manifestations of divine grace, couldn't an argument be made for continuing in the domain of sin, so that the radical character of God's grace might be even more apparent? If God justifies the ungodly and the greatness of his grace is most apparent in this, why should we ever leave the domain of sin? In the previous chapter Paul spoke of opposing reigns, the reign of sin in death, and the reign of grace through righteousness leading to eternal life.

God's grace bursts into the realm of sin's power like a blinding light, but its effect is to release us from that realm and to bring us into another realm, the realm of grace, where it reigns through righteousness. If grace delivers us from the realm of sin, so radically that we are described as having died to it, continuing to act as if we lived in the realm of sin would be to empty grace of meaning, it would be like the freed slave that continued to grovel before his old master. The Christian has experienced a transition from the old realm of sin's reign in death to the realm of the reign of grace in righteousness leading to eternal life, and this transition is enacted in baptism.

In baptism we are united to Christ and his death, so that we might also share in his resurrection life. In the present by moral newness of life, by the work of the resurrecting spirit, and in the future as our bodies themselves will be raised to eternal life. Many people get nervous when Paul speaks about baptism in this way.

Some have argued that Paul cannot be speaking about actual water baptism. His statements suggest salvation by baptism. He must be talking about some inner spiritual baptism.

However for Paul, these things are not detached from each other. Entrance into the new realm of life in Christ occurs through baptism. How then are we to make sense of this? The first thing to consider here is that baptism is an integral part of the larger movement of turning to Christ.

An analogy might help. When an old king dies, the next in the line of succession immediately accedes to the throne. The throne is never left vacant.

However, while the accession to the throne is immediate in some senses, there is a process by which it is proclaimed, formalised and put into full effect. The coronation of the new monarch can occur months after the accession. In the case of King Edward VIII, in the UK, there was never a coronation, as he abdicated beforehand.

In Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's case, the coronation was 14 months after the accession. She was the queen months before the coronation, but her coronation was not an afterthought. When people think of Her Majesty the Queen becoming queen, it is probably the coronation that comes to their mind.

King Edward VIII's entry into kingship, however, was abortive, not least because there was no coronation ceremony. The coronation is the ceremonial formalisation and glorious manifestation of the new reign. And baptism is not dissimilar.

Entrance into the new life of Christ is both instantaneous and a process, a process of which baptism is the great formalisation and enactment. Conversion without baptism for Paul would be seen as incomplete, a failure to enter into the full reality of what God has given us in salvation. Like the coronation of a new monarch, baptism ceremonially enacts the reality of the transition in a way that symbolically manifests the meaning and significance of what is occurring.

It brings the transition into its full effect, bringing the baptised person into full and public communion in the church. A coronation is a public and dramatic manifestation of the reality of what has and is taking place in acceding to the throne, assuring the newly crowned monarch of their full and true possession of the authority and dignity of the throne, and displaying the reality of the glory of the new monarch to both the kingdom and the wider world. Baptism again is much the same.

It is a seal of the transition to us, assuring us of its reality, of the firmness of Christ's promises to us and of the unreserved dedication of our lives to which we are summoned. It also manifests our transition to the church and the world, calling them to treat us differently from here on out. Paul speaks of baptism as actually accomplishing something, of bringing us into possession of new life.

Is Paul teaching some magical doctrine of baptism? Not at all. Ceremonies can affect remarkable changes. Two single people can walk into a church, go through a ceremony, say some words, exchange rings, and come out as a married couple.

Now the two persons could conceivably go through the ceremony and leave the church, go their separate ways and never interact again. Everyone could continue to treat them as if they were still single, and the wedding would be a fairly empty charade. Although formally their status would have changed, in actual fact little else had.

The efficacy of a wedding ceremony is in large measure found in the fact that the participants live and view themselves in a very different way afterwards. The efficacy of the ceremony is largely prospective. It anticipates the couple confirming the meaning of the ceremony in living new lives after it, new lives that are lived in terms of what occurred in the ceremony.

Although a couple may fail to live out the reality that a wedding ceremony ushers them into, many do fail in this way. A wedding does not bring one into an ambivalent status. It anticipates a positive response, and the person who fails to live faithfully in the newness of married life empties the wedding of its meaning.

Baptism is much the same. Baptism formalises, ceremonially enacts, and seals to us our entrance into the privileges of sons and daughters of God. Its efficacy is mostly prospective.

It anticipates our actual living out of the new lives into which we have been brought. Paul wants the Romans, and us, to look at our baptisms and to live out the meaning of what God has declared concerning us in them. The expectation is that baptised Christians will be living lives of a markedly different character.

The baptised Christian who is going on living as he did before is violating the meaning of his baptism. For Paul, our baptism anticipates and assures us of future resurrection. In baptism our bodies are marked out as bodies to be raised in glory on the last day.

Our baptisms call us to look at our bodies differently. God has claimed our bodies, in all of their weakness, frailty, mortality, unshapeliness, ugliness, and indignity, for the glory of his heavenly kingdom. Our bodies now belong to the realm of grace.

Our bodies are to be released from the dominion of death, from the shame of sin that we feel when we are exposed to others' gaze, or experience a sense of violation on account

of things that we have done with, or others have done to, our bodies. We have been set free, and God wants us to enter into the full experience of that freedom, as his grace reigns in the realm of our bodies, through his saving righteousness, until that great day when we are re-clothed with glorious bodies, like our saviour Jesus Christ, and God's deliverance is consummated in our enjoyment of life eternal. This transition, however, is one that only occurs through union with Christ.

We are delivered as our bodies are united with his body, as his death becomes our death, as our old man is crucified with him, and laid to rest in his tomb. As Christians we exist as people between death and life, people caught in the tension between Christ's death and his resurrection. Our lives play out in this realm.

Our release from sin through union with Christ has been proclaimed in baptism, and now we live in anticipation of its full realisation on the last day. Christ no longer lives in the realm of the dominion of death, he has overcome it. If we are united with Christ and his death, a reality ceremonially enacted and sealed to us in baptism, we need to think about ourselves very differently.

We are simultaneously dead and alive. While we still have one foot in the realm of death and have mortal bodies, yet we already experience the new life of the resurrecting spirit within us. Recalling the fact of our baptisms, by faith we are to reckon what they declare to be true of us.

Henceforth we are to consider ourselves very differently. Considering ourselves dead to sin and alive to God involves no longer habitually living in terms of the reign of sin as puppets of our passions. Being set free is of little meaning if we still continue to turn up for work for our old master every day.

Likewise, the new life of grace is something that we are called to live out. You can't have new life unless you are actively living it. For Paul this living out of new life is focused on the realm of the body.

We must cease offering our bodily members as instruments for unrighteousness and must instead present ourselves to God as those raised to new life, with our members as instruments of righteousness. There are sacrificial overtones that we might recognise here. In Romans 12.1 Paul urges the Roman Christians to present their bodies as a living sacrifice.

This sacrificial presentation of the body, powerfully symbolically enacted in baptism, is confirmed in lives of Christian obedience. The sacrificial paradigm that Paul employs in Romans 12.1 is not so explicit but it is no less present in this chapter. We are called to present our members, to offer our bodies like sacrifices to God.

And the grounds for this exhortation are found in our union with Christ in his death and

resurrection. The sacrificial overtones in Paul's statement are to be seen not only in his use of the term present but also in the notion of presenting members, sacrifices were offered to God in a dismembered form. This is also priestly in character.

Priestly initiation involved the symbolic devotion of limbs and organs to God's service, with the blood placed upon particular parts of the body. By speaking of the presentation of our members, our limbs and organs to God, Paul accords a greater prominence to the body. What we present to God is not just our actions, not just our agency, nor even yet ourselves as agents, but our limbs and organs themselves in their givenness and objectivity.

All of this presents a sacrificial model for Christian obedience. In Christian obedience we confirm in practice the offering of our bodies which occurred in baptism. Paul's grounding of Christian obedience in the limbs and organs of the body also creates an extremely tight connection between person and action.

By acting righteously I am presenting my limbs and organs to God, a membering of the sacrifice of my whole self. John Berkeley draws attention to a further importance of the body within Paul's account of ethics in Romans, highlighting the way that Paul locates the operation of sin and its defeat within the body. He writes It is precisely in his or her corporeality that the believer is simultaneously dead and alive.

It is not for nothing that Paul here uses military language, weapons, since the body is the critical site of resistance. The very location where sin once had most visible sway and where its grip still draws believers' bodily selves towards death is now the location where the newness of life breaks through into action, displaying in counterintuitive patterns of behaviour the miraculous Christ-life that draws their embodied selves towards the vivification or redemption of the body. Some scholars have spoken about the notion of a habitus.

A habitus is our basic embodied orientation towards life, our dispositions, perceptions, sensibilities, our ordering structures, our tastes, our styles, our bodily skills and our habits. A habitus is what we have learned by body, those things that have become second nature to us. Paul, John Berkeley suggests, had a sense of this when he spoke of the body of sin.

He writes He seems to have a sense that the body has been commandeered by sin, such that its dispositions, emotions, speech patterns and habitual gestures are bound to systems of honour, self-aggrandisement and licence that are fundamentally at odds with the will of God. The Christian life of obedience that Paul expresses is a life that begins with and in the body. The bodily habitus of sin has to be unworked and a new righteous bodily habitus instilled in its place.

And baptism is the place where this training of our bodies most clearly begins. Berkeley

writes again One could hardly imagine a more effective demonstration of this rescue than the physical rite of baptism, which Paul interprets as a transition from death to life, performed on and with the body. Henceforth believers give themselves over to this new life as alive from the dead, inasmuch as they present their organs as weapons of righteousness to God.

In other words, they are committed to instantiate a new embodied habitus. This training of the body is almost invariably a social matter. Our bodies are trained as they are incorporated into a larger social body.

No one is born as a native of such a community, nor can we simply choose to be natives. We must all be formed into natives through the inculcation of a particular habitus. This is a slow process where we take on the character of new people.

Baptism is a first step in the process of forming the habitus of the Christian faith within us. At the point of baptism our bodies are written into the larger social body, incorporated into it. This formation of the individual body through the social body is alluded to in Romans 12 verse 1, which speaks of presenting bodies, plural, as a living sacrifice, singular.

Our individual bodies are rendered sacrificial as they are made part of the many-membered body of Christ. It is a matter of great significance that baptism brings us into the social body of the visible church. The movement of the body into the life of the church, a movement whose first major step occurs in baptism, is an essential part of Christian training and the process of conformity to the likeness of Christ.

Without baptism's process of incorporating us into the body of Christ and the bodily training that follows it in the visible church, the pedagogical process of conforming us to Christ would be extremely limited and the most fundamental part of ourselves would not have been offered to God. In baptism our limbs and organs are set apart for God's service. This divine claim upon our bodies is a founding principle of Christian ethics.

It's one of the chief reasons why Christian obedience should be properly understood as sacrificial. Baptism manifests and initiates a reorientation of the body and its members. It incorporates us into a new social body.

Indeed it's a practice that forms the social body itself, the body of the church, and it does so in order that we might, through its co-option and training of our bodies in liturgy and rituals, in practices and forms and in relations, that we might begin to think, to desire, to perceive, to be disposed and to relate differently, that we might learn to live as natives of the body of Christ. Baptism then not only expresses the sacrificial principle that grounds Christian imperatives, it also begins to instill in us the sacrificial habitus by which we will fulfil them. Sin's dominion over us, a dominion that imposes understanding, is strengthened by the law, has ceased.

We now live in the realm of grace. However our release from the realm of sin and death has to be lived out as we present ourselves as servants to a very different master. The story of the Exodus, for instance, a story that had its great transition in the crossing of the Red Sea, was a story of moving from the oppressive service of Pharaoh to the dignifying and glorifying service of the Lord.

We must make a similar movement. We make a mockery of our release if we carry on living our old way of life. For Paul, slavery and freedom are paradoxically interrelated.

Freedom from sin is discovered in obedience from the heart to the teaching that we have been placed under, and in becoming slaves to righteousness. This is a willing slavery to God. We often think of freedom as living without a master, and living without any law or standard.

For Paul, true freedom is obedience from the heart to a new, good master, who liberates us from the cruelty of other masters, not least the mastery of our own passions. Freedom, for instance, can be found in authorisation. The Israelites enjoyed a much higher status when they were made servants of God, a kingdom of priests, not just allowed to fend for themselves in the wilderness.

They came under the more direct rule of God, but that rule was one that authorised them and gave them authority, not just one that placed them under authority. Likewise, there is freedom to be found through obedience to a standard. The person who learns the standards and the principles of a musical instrument, to the point that they can play as a virtuoso, is far freer with that instrument than the person who observes no standards or principles, and ignorantly treats the instrument as if no training were required to play it.

The point of obedience from the heart is important. The law is written on the hearts of the people of God in the New Covenant. No longer is the law just an external master, something that we resist and rebel against.

Rather, it should be something that we willingly obey from the heart, something in which we find true freedom. The old slavery that we were in was one that escalated. We might recall the progressive stages of giving people up in Romans chapter 1. It was a movement into greater levels of impurity and lawlessness, leading to more dreadful degrees of dishonour and bondage.

However, as we present ourselves to a new master, the vicious cycle is replaced by a virtuous one. As we present our members as slaves to righteousness, it leads to sanctification, to our being set apart for God's presence and service. The old slavery seemed to promise a sort of liberty.

It declared that we were free from the demands of righteousness and God. However, the

true nature of that supposed freedom was disclosed through its progressive outworking. It yielded the fruit of shame.

It led to bitter consequences in our lives as we reaped its fruit. It led to bondage to our passions. It led to the breakdown of our relationships.

And ultimately, its outcome was death. However, while we are replacing one form of slavery with another, in becoming slaves of God rather than slaves of sin, the two forms of slavery could not be more different. And the difference is ultimately revealed in the radically different outcomes that they have.

Slavery to God ultimately leads to the honour and the glory of being set apart for God, in contrast to the old shame and the tyranny of our old master. Slavery to God, instead of yielding death, ultimately leads to eternal life. And Paul returns to the conclusion of chapter 5 in the final verse, wrapping up the entire argument of the chapter.

There are two contrasting ways, the way of sin and the way of grace. Sin pays wages. The natural outworking of sin is death.

However, grace operates in a very different way. It isn't wages, but a free gift, a super abundant gift, nothing short of eternal life itself. And it's given to us in and through the Messiah, Jesus our Lord.

If we receive this gift, let us live in it. A question to consider, what are some practical ways in which we can more fully express the corporeality of our presenting our bodily members to God in Christian service?