

## The 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

**Genesis 21:8-21; Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17; Matthew 10:24-39; Romans 6:1b-11**

**Genesis 21:8-21** is the account of Abraham's exile of his son Ishmael and his second wife, Hagar, because of the perceived threat that they pose to Isaac and Sarah. It is a story about threat, the abuse of power, efforts at amelioration, God's protection of both of the sons, and the origins of the enmity between the Hebrews and the Arabs.

The story begins innocently enough. Isaac is born to Sarah, and she declares, "God has brought laughter (*sechoq*) for me; everyone who hears will laugh (*sachaq*) with me" (21:6). This is a highly intentional play on the name, Isaac, which will have its consequences later on in the story. The Hebrew name, "Isaac" (*I sachaq*) means "He laughs". One can better capture the play on words in the translation I prefer, "God has brought me laughter; all who hear of it will laugh with me". That is, "God has brought me Isaac; that has brought me laughter and everyone else laughs with me and laughs over my joy because of Laughter born to me!"

So Sarah rejoices over the birth of her son! But then a cloud is drawn over her joy. The author of Genesis writes, "But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac" (vs. 9). Although the NRSV translation doesn't record the wordplay going on here, this is a further wordplay on the name "Isaac". And that wordplay is directly related to the wordplay in verse 6.

The word translated "playing" is in an unusual form (piel form of the verb *sachaq*) so that it has the sense of "mocking laughter" or "derisive laughter" about it. That is, the text is suggesting that Ishmael's playing with Isaac was one in which the baby was squealing with delight but Ishmael's play with him was condescending, mocking or even potentially threatening. It was this play that awakened the "Mother Tiger" impulse within Sarah so that she demanded of Abraham, "Cast out this woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit (that is, share inheritance with) along with my son Isaac" (vs. 10).

"The matter was very distressing to Abraham for the son (Ishmael) was his, too". But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of Ishmael and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring" (vv. 12-13).

One cannot understand this story unless one understands the Israelite (and, in fact, the entire Near Eastern) understanding of "birthright". It was true that there was "bad blood" between Hagar and Sarah, because the presence of Hagar's son, Ishmael, was a constant reminder to Sarah of her unwillingness to trust God for the child God had promised to her. Instead, Sarah had manipulated the situation so that Hagar became Abraham's consort and provided him with a son of inheritance (Gen. 16:1-4). Further, Hagar's attitude toward Sarah, after she was delivered of Ishmael, was one of contempt because Hagar had accomplished what Sarah seemingly could not (16:4-6). But the true competition between them was not simply the reminder to Sarah of her lack of trust and of Hagar's attitude toward Sarah. The true competition between them was over the birthright!

To the entire Semitic race, but particularly to the Hebrews, the concept of birthright underlay their transfer of power, wealth, religious leadership and their law from generation to generation. That transfer happened through the eldest son (Gen. 10:15; 22:21; 44:12; Exod. 6:14; Num. 3:2; I Sam. 17:28).

The family line, leadership of a family or clan, the transfer of a family's wealth, and all inheritance within the Hebrew system passed from father to the eldest son. That son received all the authority his father had enjoyed, made all decisions regarding the future of that family, controlled the family's wealth, received preferential treatment not only from within the family but by all in the clan and tribe, and was even the spiritual leader of the family (e.g., Gen. 27:1-4; Gen. 37:22; Gen. 43:33; Deut. 21:17). Although it was technically possible for a father to pass by the eldest son for a younger son (for example, if the eldest son was sickly or incompetent), it could only be done in the most extreme cases and was essentially unacceptable; in fact, once the Mosaic Law was written, such transference of birthright became illegal (Deut. 21:15-17). The right of inheritance of the family's future, wealth and spirituality was the "birthright" of the eldest son, the prerogatives that were his by reason of being the first male born in that family.

Thus, the real issue in this story is the issue, "Who will receive the birthright – Ishmael or Isaac?" By the law of the times, the birthright was Ishmael's to inherit – even if his mother were a slave and not Abraham's wife. But if Sarah had anything to do about it, that birthright was going to go to Isaac, flesh of her flesh and bone of her bone. Watching Ishmael mockingly play with Isaac made Sarah realize that she could not tarry in this matter but had to act while the two boys were too young to do anything about it and Abraham was still entranced with the birth of his second son. Thus Sarah acts to convince Abraham to cast out from the family both Hagar and Ishmael. But Abraham was distressed with Sarah's pressure "for Ishmael was his son too"!

The matter is resolved by God in Genesis 21:12-13. And it is resolved by God promising both sons an inheritance. Isaac would inherit the birthright from Abraham, thus becoming the founder of Israel and the Jewish people. But Ishmael was also to be seen as a child of Abraham, and had been chosen by God to become the founder of the Ishmaelites and, eventually, the Arabian peoples.

Thus, the story now moves to Hagar and Ishmael's exile from their family. "So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder (so that Hagar went away) along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba" (vs. 14).

Hagar and Ishmael are exiled into the desert. And initially, they are threatened there with starvation, dehydration and exposure to the elements (vss. 15-16). But God intervenes and protects them both by providing emergency rations for them and teaching them to survive in a desert environment (vss. 17-19). So "God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt" (vss. 20-21). Thus Hagar and Ishmael survived, and Ishmael became the progenitor of the Ishmaelites and, eventually, the Arabian peoples, just as Isaac became the progenitor of the Jewish people!

As I stated earlier, this is a story of threat, the abuse of power, efforts at amelioration, God's protection of both of the sons, and the origins of the enmity between the Jews and the Arabs. The threat to Hagar was the potential that Isaac would usurp the birthright that rightly belonged to Ishmael. The threat to Sarah was that her child – the only child of both herself and her spouse Abraham – would be denied birthright and thus would not fulfill the promise given to both she and Abraham that it would be their child (and not the child of a slave and Abraham) who would “give rise to nations; kings of people shall come from her” (17:16) in which “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:2-3; also, see 13:16; 15:4-6; 17:15-19; 18:9-15).

The abuse of power was primarily on Sarah's part, but also on the part of Abraham, as well. Sarah was not a person who could trust in God's capacity to work out the impossible. She laughed in disbelief when she heard God's promise that she would bear a child. She manipulated Abraham into a sexual relationship with Hagar in order to produce a male heir because she could not depend upon God to fulfill his promise through her. And now, faced with the law of birthright, she acted to protect her interests and to destroy those of Hagar's without depending upon God to work out the dilemma God's way (which, of course, God would have done). Thus, she abuses her status as the wife of Abraham to manipulate a weak-willed husband into acting against all social convention and jeopardizing the life of his first-born son in order to secure the birthright for Sarah's son. And the pain and torment this gave to both Hagar and Ishmael contributed to the animosity that would stand between the heirs of both brothers even to this present day!

The efforts of amelioration were weak, at best. Abraham had the responsibility of opposing Sarah directly, and as the family's patriarch, insist on justice. He did not. He allowed pressure and persuasion to force his hand. His attempts at amelioration – giving Hagar food and drink for the journey and personally seeing them off – was a weak substitute for the confrontative action he ought to have taken. Thus, Abraham contributed to the problem and to the lasting enmity between the two cultures because he was unwilling to act justly.

But God would not allow the matter to rest there. The faithless decisions of wife and husband had created a situation that could not be completely repaired. But God did act to provide provision to Hagar and Ishmael, and the courage and strength on both of their parts to make a life for themselves – and a successful life, at that – in the midst of the most intolerable situations. In spite of Sarah's manipulative nature and Abraham's spineless nature, God still made of Isaac the man that sustained the children of Israel to the next generation and the continuance of the line that would eventually bring to the world Moses, David, the prophets and Jesus!

Finally, the deed had lasting consequences – four thousand years of consequences. For the book of Genesis tells us that this was the beginning of the hostility between the peoples of Israel and of Arabia – a hostility that continues unabated to today and threatens the safety of the entire world! One man's spineless decision, based upon yielding to one woman's pressure, has still not worked its way out in the harm it has done to 4,000 years of humans and of human society. It is a reminder to all of us of the gravity of the decisions that we are called upon to make!

**Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17** is the lectionary selection of the Psalm for today. The selection is a peculiar selection because it does not fit the thematic divisions of the psalm and it interrupts in a strategic way the message of that psalm (including taking out the key verse of the psalm which is verse 11). Consequently, this commentary will look at the entirety of the psalm and will ignore the particular selection of verses that the lectionary makes.

Psalm 86 is encapsulated by verse 11: “Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name”. This psalm is about the worshipper of God being undivided between his life’s goals and living a life centered upon God. It is about the one who sings this psalm being a person who has an undivided heart to glorify God!

The psalm divides naturally into three parts. The first part, verses 1-7, is a prayer for God’s help. The second part, verses 8-13 is a hymn of praise that introduces the theme of an undivided heart. The final part, verses 14-17, renews the petition of the first seven verses but does so from the perspective of being single-minded in the commitment of the psalmist to the worship and service of God.

The primary petition of the first part of the psalm (verses 1-7) is, “Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me”. The petitioner wants to have God’s ear, as if he were whispering in the ear of the monarch sitting on his throne who leans his ear to the side in order to hear more clearly what the petitioner is whispering into it. The psalmist’s petition is, “Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. Be gracious to me, O Lord” (vs. 2). The sense is that the petitioner has done something wrong that has the potential to be objectionable to the monarch. Sensing his own lack of judgment, the psalmist wants to ameliorate the offense by confessing to it before the monarch finds out about it, and to beg for mercy. There is no attempt on the psalmist’s part to justify the wrong or to explain it away. He simply throws himself upon the mercy of God. And that brings us to the second part.

In verses 8-13, the psalmist praises God the monarch for his wisdom, discernment and discretion. And it is then, in the light of the utter fairness of God, that the psalmist makes his request that he be given “an undivided heart to revere your name” so that he will no longer be tempted to act against God’s will. Sensing the willingness of God to claim that undivided heart, the psalmist prays, “I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol” (vss. 12-13).

The psalmist now moves into the third part of the psalm (verses 14-17). He acknowledges that there are many people, forces, conditions and objects in the world that tempt him to divide his heart and loyalties in an effort to serve his own purposes. But although that is true, “you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious. So turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl” (vss. 15-16). Thus the psalmist acknowledges that he will not have an undivided heart if it depends simply upon him, precisely because he becomes tempted by people, forces, conditions and objects in the world that would lead him away from being focused on God. But he can depend upon God to be faithful to the task of keeping him centered on God. The psalmist can’t maintain an undivided heart, but God

can enable the psalmist to be undivided. For it is God, and only God who has “helped me and comforted me” (vs. 17) for the remainder of his life.

**Matthew 10:24-39** is definitely one of Jesus’ “hard sayings”! It has to do with the inevitable reaction of and continued persecution by those who are opposed to the values and priorities of the kingdom of God. Those whose objective in life is to dominate, oppress, exploit and control will not welcome authentic Christianity!

Jesus presents the persecutions he sees coming to those who profess him and who work for the establishment of his shalom community (the kingdom of heaven). He indicates that he is “sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (10:16). We will stand before governors and kings and even Caesar himself and both give witness to God’s intentions for humanity and call these systems to accountability for their greed, lust for unilateral power and obsession with dominating. And the systems will react to the agitation we bring through our words and deeds. They will hate us for the genuine threat we pose to them and their hegemony of the people. If we are truly authentic Christians, we will be perceived as extremely dangerous to their world as they have created and maintained it. And, consequently, we will be persecuted for it!

“But have no fear of them (the systems or their representatives). Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (10:26a, 28). Keep your values and priorities straight. Remain committed to the vision of the kingdom of God. Remain a disciple of Him who is your Caesar of God’s kingdom. “So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows” (10:31)!

Jesus then makes a most stunning statement. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household” (vss. 34-36).

Jesus has often been perceived as the one who ultimately brings peace. In John’s gospel, for example, he declares, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid” (John 14:27). But here in Matthew, he declares “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”. What does he mean by these apparently contradictory statements?

The peace that Jesus brings his followers is the shalom of God’s Kingdom. It is “Jesus’ peace”. That peace is the inevitable result of our embrace of shalom – of the shalom community.

But when we embrace Christ and his kingdom, we automatically alienate all who live by the values and priorities of a dominating world. Those who live by a culture of greed, who operate out of a value of scarcity rather than abundance, and who feel the necessity of grabbing for all that they can get perceive you who live out of a value of sharing wealth and equitably distributing it, will inevitably perceive you as a threat to their acquisitive standards. They will

perceive you as a threat, whether they are a CEO of an international corporation, a national political figure or those who administer the budget of your church, school or business. And perceiving you as a threat, they will seek to minimize, ostracize, dismiss or eliminate you. That is not only true of the world of economics; it is also true politically (loving power more than justice), socially (requiring conformity to one's values rather than embracing all people) or spiritually (committed to control rather than the building of a society of love). "You cannot serve God and mammon!"

The direct result of Jesus bringing the shalom community to us and our consequent embrace of that community is for us to experience conflict. There is no way around this inevitability. The very result of giving ourselves to Jesus and Jesus' kingdom is the inevitable rejection and even hatred of those systems, structures and people who have given themselves to a society that rewards them for acting greedily, seeking to accumulate power and to dominate those who are different than they are. Thus, in a most profound sense, Jesus' very bringing of peace to us is to guarantee that "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword"! Persecution is inevitable. And if you are not experiencing persecution for your embrace of God's kingdom, then that means that you have likely not embraced it sufficiently clearly that the world reacts against you. As someone has wisely put it, "If you are accused of following Jesus, is there enough evidence to indict you?"

But Jesus takes it even a step further. The conflict Jesus brings is a conflict of values and of the purpose of life which underlies and helps create those values. Therefore, not only will that commitment separate us from our society's political, economic and religious elite and their systems. It may even separate us from our families! We may find that whereas we embrace a politics of justice, our own family may give itself over to a politics of control that seeks to dominate all who take issue with it. Although, as children of God's kingdom, we embrace an economics of equitable distribution of wealth for the elimination of poverty, our own family may be committed to an economics of acquisition, of estate building and of greed, including a willingness to exploit those from invisible societies if they provide more goods for our enjoyment. Although, as those who seek to build the shalom community, we embrace values-systems of loving and trusting relationships, our own family might be parochial in its thinking (we trust only those who are like us) or so committed to domination (do not question what we believe). So, we will discover that our very commitment to Christ and his kingdom brings us into inevitable conflict, not just with political authorities, economic power-houses and religious or academic leaders, but also with the people with whom we are most close – our very own extended or even nuclear family! Thus, by following Jesus, we may discover the truth of his words, "I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, so that one's foes will be members of one's own household"!

What does such conflict mean for us who follow Jesus? It simply means this: "Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life (in the domination system) will lose it, and those who lose their life (as a result of their commitment to the shalom vision) for my sake will find it" (10:38-39).

It finally comes down to this: “Choose you this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Judges 24:15a; c). It always comes down to a choice. And there is no way to avoid such a choice. God or Satan? Jesus or Beelzebub (i.e., “Lord of darkness” Mt. 9:34; 12:24)? Justice or unilateral power? Generosity or greed? An embrace of humanity or dismissal of those with whom we differ? Shalom or domination? Choose you this day. If you “find your life” by embracing the way of the political, economic and religious systems, you will “lose your life”. But if you “lose your life” by embracing the values of the kingdom of God and live in the shalom of those values “for my sake, you will find it”!

Thus, Jesus concludes this section with the profound words, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple – truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward” (10:40, 42). Those who welcome the Shalom community, its leaders and followers, and who embrace the values of a just, equitable and God-centered society – “none of these will lose their reward”! Such is the power of the Kingdom of God!

**Romans 6:1b-11** begins with a very strange question: “Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound” (6:1b)? What is Paul talking about?

Paul is returning to his statement in Romans 5:20b: “But where sin increased, grace abounded all the more”. Apparently, there were those both inside and outside Christianity that were radically misinterpreting Paul’s argument, and because that misinterpretation was so attractive, believers were embracing it.

What Paul was doing in the previous chapter of Romans was arguing for the power of grace as acted out in Jesus Christ. Paul never underestimated sin and both its insidious penetration throughout each human and all society and its immense power to corrupt. His doctrine of sin that later came to be known as “Total Depravity” was not that each human has no good in him but that depravity (sin) permeates the entirety of the human race and any society humans build (Rom. 3:9-12; 5:12; 8:7-8; 11:35-36; I Cor. 2:13; 4:7; II Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:17-19;

“But where sin abounds, grace does much more abound”! No matter how deep, how penetrating, how comprehensive or wide sin might be, God’s grace enacted through Jesus Christ is greater! Paul is arguing in Rom. 5 that there is no sin beyond the power of grace to overcome, no permeation of sin throughout the entirety of human society that cannot be eliminated through the power of God’s grace. He is arguing both for the extent and the power of God’s amazing grace!

But others took Paul’s argument in an entirely different direction, thereby turning Paul’s argument into ridicule. They took his statement, “But where sin increased, grace did much more abound”, and suggested that it was every Christian’s (and every human being’s) obligation to sin as much as possible. Why? Because the more you would sin, the more God’s grace would be called upon to eliminate that sin! That is, by boldly and intentionally sinning, each Christian was contributing to the activating of God’s grace upon humanity. They were truly reinterpreting that old gospel hymn to sing, “I was sinking deep in sin – Wheee!”

But Paul's reaction is no "Wheee!" His reaction is utter recoil. "Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound? By no means" (vss. 1b-2a)! The Greek that is translated "by no means" is as emphatic and as shocked as that language can make it! It could equally be translated, "God forbid" or "No way"! It is the strongest-possible statement of shocked recoil! Paul is utterly scandalized that anyone could interpret his teaching this way!

Paul then moves to his main argument, seeking to prove how utterly preposterous such an interpretation could be of a statement that was trying to declare the utter depth of both our capacity to sin and of God to forgive. "How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (6:2b-4).

Paul builds his argument against this misinterpretation of his teaching around the sacrament of baptism (this reference, incidentally, gives an indication of how important the sacraments were to the earliest church). Thinking in terms of baptism by immersion, Paul describes a new believer as being totally submerged in the waters of baptism, and then lifted up out of that water as it cascades off her. The act of totally submerging the believer in the baptismal waters is symbolic of that person dying to his or her old way of life; it can be likened to Jesus' death on our behalf. The act of lifting the person back out of the baptismal waters is symbolic of that person's resurrection into new life, and can be likened to Jesus' resurrection. This is the metaphor that Paul uses to make his case.

Baptism is to Paul an outward sign of an inward condition. That is, the new believer is submerged in the waters, symbolizing his death to the way of life that formerly dominated him. As a person formerly of this world (whether a Gentile pagan or a Jew), all of us lived lives both under domination and dominating others. We were possessed by greed (even if that economically hurt our neighbor), the lust for power (even if that oppressed or took advantage of those around us), and seeking to control everything in our environment (rather than being in caring relationships with one another). Consequently, we were not people of "shalom", of "God's kingdom" but rather of the kingdom of Satan, and consequently the kingdoms of Rome or official Jewry.

But Jesus changed all that! And Jesus changed all that for each of us! His word became gospel to us, he revealed to us a new way of life ("the kingdom of God") where we could actively live for justice, equity and oneness with God and each other. And he offered us that new way of life through his own death at the hands of the systems. Thus, as Jesus died for us, so, by receiving God's immeasurable grace, we both "take on" Christ and "die" to this former pagan way of life. And our baptism symbolizes all that, because in it, "we have been buried (submerged) with Christ by baptism into death" (6:4).

But baptism doesn't end with submersion into the death of water. Baptism ends with being lifted out of those waters of death! Baptism ends with our resurrection. As Jesus rose again from the dead, thereby revealing to all his victory over the Powers that be and the values of those Powers as we have embraced them, so we are lifted out of the waters of baptism into the embrace of new



life in Christ! Thus, “just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (vs. 4b)!

Paul now moves from symbol to statement, in order to make his argument. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, so we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But 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. 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” (6:5-11).

What Paul is presenting here is what Christian theologians would later call the doctrine of “sanctification”. The word “sanctification” (from the Greek, *hagiasmos*, or “holiness”) is the belief that embracing Christ as our own is not simply an act that we do that is complete, in and of itself. Rather, it is the first step of a journey, a process of the growth or maturation of faith that continues our whole life long. The term, “spiritual formation” is another term for “sanctification”, suggesting that Christ is increasingly being formed in us as we grow into an ever-deeper embrace of a commitment to justice, a willingness to use our money for the sake of the gospel and a desire for ever more loving relationship with God, our brothers and sisters in Christ and of all humanity -- believers and unbelievers alike! It is what Paul referred to, when he wrote to the Christians in Galatia his wish for Christ to be “formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

Building on his earlier metaphor of baptism, Paul adds now another magnificent metaphor to express his belief in the necessity of sanctification. He writes, “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (vs. 5). The Greek word translated “united” is *symphytos* (from which we get the words “symphony” and “sympathetic”). The word literally means “being planted with”. What Paul is suggesting here is that whereas *justification* is the act of initially responding to Christ’s embrace of us, *sanctification* is the process by which we become more “Christ-like”! We are “planted” in Christ, and thus “grow up” into Christ, becoming more “united” (or “sympathetic” or “attuned”) to Christ and Christ’s priorities of justice, economic sharing, commitment to the elimination of poverty, and the deepest of loving and trusting relationships with God and each other. And when we become more “Christ-like” through such “growing up” into Christ, we increasingly become part of Christ’s “symphony” of that community of believers all seeking to live their lives “in concert” with one another, giving ourselves to the causes of justice and equity in the world, and at one with God-in-Christ!

The result of being “planted” and “growing up in Christ” in both our public action as well as our personal spiritual formation is that, like Christ, we are now “dead” to any kind of life that enjoys sinning. “The death Christ 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” (vss. 10-11). “Growing up” into Christ in the ways described by Paul here (so that such spiritual formation includes both public action and private devotion) means that, in due time, we become repelled by sin! Those so growing into Christ will no longer seek to sin in order for grace to abound. In fact, the very idea will disgust them! Rather, all that such Christians will desire is to be “alive to

God in Christ Jesus” and consequently to rejoice in the reality in and through their lives that “grace does much more abound”!

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