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“Indiana Jones and the Temple of Grace” The Rev. Aaron M. G. Zimmerman (7/2/2023, Fifth Sunday after Pentecost)

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Let us pray. Almighty God, in the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight. Oh Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer, amen.

Here at St. Albans, we recently started a new ministry for people 50 Plus, if you want to be part of it, talk to Florence Scattergood. Right there, Florence Scattergood. There you go. So, it's called Prime Time classics. And I have recently realized who the spokesperson for this ministry should be, I'm going to reach out to his people and see what I can do. The patron saint of this ministry, none other than Han Solo, Harrison Ford. Mr. Ford is 80 years old. And this weekend just saw the release of his fifth and maybe final Indiana Jones movie, the final one will be him looking for his dentures in a nursing home, the sixth one, but the fifth. He's not there yet. Harrison, not only at 80 years old, has released a fantastic movie, and he is in great shape. But he also I don't want to talk about that I want to talk about his The second interesting thing he's done is an 80 year old person. For the first time in his life, always you should try new things. For the first time in his life. He is doing a TV series, it is on Apple TV, it is called shrinking, in which he plays wise old therapist who sort of serves as a mentor to some younger therapists. And I bring this up, I promise I have a point I bring this up. Because this show demonstrates what I see all the time in my life and in my pastoral ministry and in just dealing with human beings. And it's this when you tell someone to do a thing. And they do the opposite thing. I don't know if you've seen this happen on the show. Harrison Ford's character tells this young therapist played by Jason Segel, you really need to be careful and not blur. The professional boundaries between you and your

clients need to keep professional and personal separate. And what does Jason Segel do? Well, when his client gets into trouble, he bails him out of jail personally, and invites him to live in his house, in the pool house and blurs those boundaries. And then. So that's one example. But then what does Harrison Ford's character do? Does he keep the boundaries very clear? Well, as it turns out, he is sort of off the books counseling Jason Siegel's daughter for some grief and anxiety issues, and has her over to his house to watch the Lakers. So this is an example I saw this, I said, this is what I see all the time. People know what the right thing is. They even tell other people to do the right thing. And yet those other people do the opposite. And they themselves do the opposite. And this does not apply to you. But the person sitting next to you probably could relate to this. You wouldn't believe the number of times I have someone in my office who says I'm going through a really hard time in my marriage. I said, well tell me a little bit about their background, how you met, and they say, well, we met in high school or whenever it was, and there were some red flags, maybe some orange flags, a few beige flags. And so my parents or my friends said, this is really not the right person for you, you should you should move on. And of course they don't. They marry the person. And what I find fascinating is that they'll tell me, you know, at the time, I kind of knew my parents were right. But I didn't want to give them the satisfaction. So you tell them the thing, they know it, you know it and they do the opposite and getting back on the the reality of aging. If you've cared for an aging parent or you are currently doing so you know that there is the dynamic where the child becomes the parent and the child is telling the parent, you really should do that silver yoga class that they offer in the assisted living place. You should do the tai chi, you should Oh, they're showing the movie, you should go see that. You should do the outings. You should take care of the things do the Sudoku, it'll strengthen your brain and ward off dementia. Do the crossword do that do that doo doo doo. And the mom or the dad or the grandparent does none of the things. Just Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy that's about as far as it gets. Maybe bingo maybe with your own self, you have a perfect morning that exists in your brain that morning involves waking up with the sun, getting the overnight oats that you made the night before, full of fiber. And superfoods involve then maybe a time of meditation, 2030 minutes, followed by a meditative walk. That perfect morning exists only in your brain. You know, you should do it, it would be good for you, if you did it, you tell yourself to do it. And yet, your alarm is

just there for hitting snooze over and over. So whatever the thing is, we know what the right thing is, we tell ourselves to do it, we tell the other person, do it, whatever, and we don't do their thing. So this is the problem of being human. And we are not fixing ourselves. Although we all want to be fixed. We want to fix the people in our lives, many of you who have come to church to get fixed, or you brought somebody here today to be to fix them. Well, you've come to the right place. No, I mean, you've been to churches that have tried to fix you, haven't you. And this is like the last stop on the train. So we'll see what we can do because this is what St. Paul is talking about in Romans chapter six. This reading from the Bible we heard today, I'm gonna give a little bit of background on what I think is Paul's sort of unbelievable insight. And then what he what he offers in light of that. Okay, so the book of Romans, chapter six. This is Paul writing, Paul, Paul was a Jewish scholar, and teacher, he became a Christian in the first century. And the message of Jesus began to spread around the Roman Empire, including the Capitol, Rome, he had never been there as a Christian. But he knows that there is this growing community of believers in Jesus there, and he wants to visit them. And so as a way to prepare, he writes, this letter says, I'm going to come visit you. But I know there's been some controversy around my message or my teaching, I want you to know what it is. So I can sort of pave the way for my upcoming visit. And so Paul is explaining his message, what he has been teaching and preaching about Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus, the Christ, the Lord. And he says, these incredible things that you may already know that Jesus is God incarnate, and He offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. And through his death, he has atone for all our sins, and we have this freedom in Christ, and we're forgiven completely the debt is paid. And this is made so clear to us, and signed, sealed and delivered by Jesus's resurrection from the dead, He didn't die, he is alive. And that's, that's the message. And he's going into what this means, what this forgiveness looks like, and all of that. And he sums it up in verse 14, he says, You are not under law, but under grace, because of Christ, you're not now under all these rules to keep to earn favor, you are now under what he calls grace, forgiveness, acceptance. And he's explaining this, but he knows people are going to get nervous. Because whenever Paul preaches this message, people get nervous. And when you preach this message today, people get nervous. And he anticipates this argument in verse 16. He says, what people always say to him, should we sin because we are not under law, but under grace?

If you're saying, we're off the hook, can we just do whatever we want? People have this idea about God. I saw it, sitting in the movie theater, waiting for Indiana Jones and Darla destiny to start in a trailer for a movie I have not heard of, and will probably not see, called the Creator. But in this trailer, it shows a man talking to a child and the child is asking about heaven. And the man says, heaven is this beautiful, perfect place in the sky. And the child says will you go there? And he says no, because only good people get to go there. That's what people think God is like, evaluating, measuring, and keeping score. And if you start saying things like everything's forgiven, and God has accepted you and Jesus has already given you an A on the H E. E, the heavenly entrance exam. If there's no threat of God's just free will, how will we ever manage your behavior? If I don't scare you to death? How am I going to get you to be good people? That's what people think that religion is about. It'll be to quote Bill Murray and Ghostbusters, mass hysteria, cats and dogs living together. If there's no threat, how will you behave? How will you be motivated to fix yourself?

Here's the thing.

If the threat worked, wouldn't you be better by now? If lecturing other people, and yourself worked, would you be here? So, what does Paul offer us in Romans chapter six? Well, the first thing and this is kind of ironic on Independence Day, when we talk about freedom and liberty, or this weekend, at least, he observes and this is his big insight. And it is contrary to much of what you have heard. He observes that people are not really free. Now, this is not about political things, or national realities. But he in terms of you as a human being in your relation to your emotional, psychological and interpersonal life, you're not really a free person. He uses the term slave *doulos*, in Greek seven times in this passage to talk about people. By the way, if you've heard the term *doula*, that's the feminine version of this word, because a midwife was usually a low level servant in the ancient home. He says, People are not free. You're you're one kind of *doulos* or another, but you're not a free person, really speaking, you're a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. Now, this is not what we want to hear. And it's not what most preachers say. Most preachers, most sermons are about they assume they wouldn't say this, but they assume that you are a free and rational person. And if I want you to improve

yourself, all I need to do is say, if you do this, it'll hurt. If you do that, your life will be better, and so do that thing. But I have been in this business long enough to know that neither you nor I are free, rational people, at least not really matters. There may be some areas in your life where you experience some degree of freedom. But what about your temper? What about your anxiety? What about your grief? What about your libidinal urges, which is Freudian talk for like the stuff down below. Me just telling you get it together, tends not to work. And Paul note, he never once says you're, you're a free agent capable of making good choices. He says you're either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness, as neither one is technically free. And the other thing, interestingly is he doesn't, he doesn't. Because of this, he doesn't tell you then just to stop sinning. He doesn't say there's the bad thing, just don't do it just work harder not to say just white knuckle even more, and you will get through it. He doesn't say just stop. And I have to tell you, I find this frustrating. I wish Paul did that. I wish he just said just cut it out. Just double down on your willpower and your resolve and just get it together. Instead he says weird things about presenting yourself to God. Present your members to God for as an instrument of righteousness. What does that? What does that mean? Well, the language of slave of doulos is, I think, a key here. Because if you think about what it wouldn't have meant to be a slave and Paul's time it was someone without power at the bottom of the totem pole, and he's saying I want you instead of trying to think that you are powerful and you can achieve and surmount and achieve glory and righteousness by your own strength. He says I want you to get in touch with your powerless Ness. To present yourself to God as someone who is powerless to realize that you are forgiven, to realize that you are not under law and you are under grace. And you are someone who approaches God as someone in need. We have healing and restoration and sanctification. Now, like I said, that is frustrating, because there's sort of nothing for you to do. I've not given you a performance improvement plan, there are no three steps. There are no apps to download. There's there's nothing to do here is except as Paul says, get in touch with your power less nests, and come in that posture to God. Now, what is this look like? There are examples one can find. But I think one of the examples that most clearly demonstrates sort of on an earthly level, what this looks like, is a 12 step meeting. And if you were ever to go to a or an A, you're the descendants of that brilliant way of seeing the world, you will know that you don't go to an AAA meeting

and say, Hi, I'm an alcoholic, and I have stopped drinking on my own power, please clap.

Step one of the 12 steps is to say, we came to realize that our lives had become unmanageable and we were powerless to change them. This is a little bit what Paul does here in this passage. He says, Remember your life when you were a slave to sin, you were powerless to change them. It was unmanageable. He says those things lead to death. Paul has taken them to step one. And of course, the next step is to say we came to see that a power higher than ourselves, could restore us to health and sanity. Presenting yourselves to God to a higher power. This is not a doubling down on human agency, freedom, rational will. This is a doubling down on a weakness and coming to God as someone who needs to be set free. I know it is Independence Day weekend. But on this Sunday, and every Sunday in church, because the gospel of Jesus Christ, its dependence day where we don't rely on ourselves. But we rely on God, the One who gives us this free gift of eternal life in Christ, and on whom we can rely. Let us pray. Almighty God help us where we most desperately need it. Because we are not strong, but weak. By the power of your Holy Spirit. Restore us to health and sanity. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.