**“Who is your master?” If this language is too uncomfortable for you we can ask; “Who do you obey?” Still not liking that question? How about, “Who holds authority in your life?” Now we’re leaning toward an answer.**

As a thoroughly modern person you will probably bristle questions like these. I know I do. We are living at the tail end of two hundred years during which society has elevated the individual. So we are well and truly conditioned to think thoughts like “I answer to no one. I am my own person.”

I really don’t want to bore you with a lesson on the history of human thought. I can say that from time immemorial up until what we call the enlightenment people viewed their personal existence as intricately bound to their tribe, their society. This meant that throughout human history across cultures and eras people have had a sense that they were inextricably linked to others. As one went through life it was simply understood that you had relationships that were horizontal and others that were vertical. In short, you knew that you were answerable to someone beyond yourself.

Ok so I bored you with a little history lesson. The fact is, regardless of trends in thought or the fact that you and I are children of the enlightenment where the individual has been made king…truth is people don’t really change. What was true of human nature when Paul wrote is still true of human nature.

We want to survive, we want to thrive so we have a deep and very useful; self-interest. Our natural self-interest however, universally becomes distorted and becomes selfishness. Left to our own devices and life experiences we become our own masters.

Even as we are able to give to others, to behave altruistically we do so in the context of what is best for us. Whether we care to admit it or not the question “What’s in this for me?” factors into just about everything we do.

In discussing free will theologian Martin Luther concluded that “We are free to do what we want but we are bound to do what we want.” In other words we think we have complete freedom and autonomy to do whatever we wish to do but in truth our inherent selfishness means we are bound to keep doing what we want. The problem is that our wants are selfish, our wants have a way of hurting others, hurting ourselves and as such distancing us from God. Right in all this is what the bible keeps calling sin.

Today we hear Saint Paul asking, “So, how’s this being your own master thing working out for you?”

Paul is saying we are slaves to that which are answerable to, and as long as we insist that we are our own masters then we work for a fool. In his letter today Paul is basically asking “Don’t you see that as long as you want to be fully “in charge” of yourself, you’re going to lead yourself down hurtful paths.” And If we’re honest and at all self-reflective we know it’s what we have always done.

Paul talks in this section of Romans a lot about sin and death. You’ve heard me do this before, I find we do well to switch out a lot of bible words so that their core message makes sense to us today. Think of sin as hurtful behavior that separates you from other people and from God. Death, as Paul uses it here is separation from God.

So the upshot is this. We, you and I, we know ourselves we know how our lives have gone. All the while we insist that we are the highest authority in our lives, that we are our own masters we are bound to do those things that separate us from others, including our loved ones, and from our God. There is no freedom here. We are always going to march ourselves toward hurt, and separation, and death. It’s what we always do.

Into this truth, right smack dab in the middle of our messed up lives God came. In Jesus God came all the way to us to save us from… ourselves. We all grew up with a lot of talk about Jesus coming “to save us from our sins”, “Jesus came to save us from death”. How about we re-frame these words? In Jesus, God came to us to free us from having to be our own masters, to free us from the hurt and distance that always comes from following ourselves. Jesus came to draw us back to where we were created to be, with and in the divine community we call God. This is where we can put down the ridiculous burden of self-autonomy.

One of my favourite images in scripture is God as the mother goose gathering her goslings back under her warm, protective wings. There is no better place for a gosling than tucked in under its mother’s wing. This is the place of safety, warmth, and sustenance.

Jesus came telling us that as we come to him we come to God. But its more, its much more fulsome and complete than “come to me and I will take you to God”. The gospel message, the eternal good news is that Jesus came to us saying enter me and through me you will enter the divine.

Here Paul’s master and slave language falls short. Jesus isn’t simply offering us the opportunity to lay our pathetic need to be in control at his feet. We aren’t being invited to simply allow God to be our master because he will do an infinitely better job at it than we do. Although this is a really good direction for us to take. No, Jesus is offering much more. As we move into Jesus we move into God. As we yield our loyalty, our control our *self* to Him God doesn’t simply become master or direction setter. God will become the water we swim in, the air we breathe Here’s where we attain our perfect freedom, when God becomes our all in all.

What makes our faith so beautiful is that in Jesus God came to us. Like the father in the story of the prodigal son, God runs down the driveway to embrace us. Ours is not a faith that says is if follow the correct bread crumbs we will walk our way to God. In Jesus God comes all the way to us but we have a role.

You see we do have free will. We can continue to insist that we act as our own masters, though honestly, we know how that’s working out for us. We can also take the only step God requires of us and make no mistake it is an incredibly difficult step. Because taking this step really does mean firing ourselves as Masters, we can say “yes”.

This, I believe is the story and the journey of life arriving at a place where we allow ourselves to be the gosling. It is my most fervent prayer that each of us will allow ourselves to receive the healing, forgiving, life-giving and eternal embrace of Jesus. Amen