

SLAVERY TO SIN OR FREEDOM IN CHRIST
(Interactive sermon with children at the 10:30 service)

I'd like to invite the kids to come up front with me and help me explain this Bible reading to the grown-ups.

[When they are gathered around at the head of the aisle by the altar, I say] God's friend St. Paul tells us in today's first story from the Bible that we, and all people, have a choice: we can be slaves to sin, or we can be set free from sin by Jesus to do good things and to live with God's blessing for ever.

Anybody like treasure hunts? [Lots of nods.] Around the church are clues and we together will need to decide whether each one is "treasure" or "trash" – and what the greatest treasure is. Then we'll come back and put the "treasures" in this box marked "Righteousness" and the "trash" in this box marked "Sin" and see what happens. So let's search, and see what actions might be sins, and what actions might be good deeds. [We walk around and find, taped to the walls and pews, sins – written in red marker on yellow paper: "lying," "being greedy," "stealing," "not forgiving," "bullying" and "mean teasing." We also find, written in green marker on green paper, deeds of righteousness like "telling the truth," "sharing," "helping," "being kind," and "being a peacemaker." We discern which ones are "trash" and which ones are "treasure" and bring them all back to the two boxes next to the pulpit.]

Let's look at what we've found and put all the good deeds in the box marked "righteousness" – they're all written in green, and when you're driving down the street, green means..."Go!" [they shout], so we'll keep doing these. Now, the sins are all written in red, and red means [they shout] "Stop!" so we'll put them in the box marked "sin" and remember to stop doing them. Let's look under the sign marked "righteousness" and see what treasure we can get..."Joy and love now, and much, much more joy and love in Heaven." Under the sign on the box marked "sin" we see the ultimate outcome is "Hell (being far, far away from God and love forever and ever)."

Now, Paul says we are "slaves to sin." Imagine that someone was tied to this box marked "sin" just like a slave would be tied to something – except maybe with steel shackles instead of rope. [A volunteer puts the rope, which is looped through the cardboard paper case, around her wrist. I say to the volunteer,] Run! The Devil's after you! [She pulls and breaks free of the box.] Wow! Who helped you get free? "God?" she asks. "Yes!" [The kids then try to lift the box, which is filled with bricks. Together they can do it, but none of them can alone.] We put just pieces of paper in this box – because people sometimes commit sins "lightly" – but look what happens after these sins get committed and get put together! [We open the box.] They produce *bricks!* Sin really weighs us down, and if we stay slaves to it, we'll never be able to escape.

Wow, that was close. Now, what about this other box? [They lift it and find out it's *much* lighter.] Let's open it – wow! When we put the *good* deeds together, they *multiply!* [There are three photocopies of each good deed inside the box, enough so that everyone can take home at least one.] Be sure to take them home – and share them with others so that everyone has something to take home. And notice – there's a Beginner's Bible in here so that people can learn more about God and God's will for us.

The final point for everyone is this: IF YOU AIM FOR HOLINESS, YOU CAN GET BOTH HOLINESS AND JOY. Joy is stronger and lasts longer than happiness. IF YOU AIM ONLY FOR YOUR OWN 'HAPPINESS' (and nobody else's), YOU WILL GET NEITHER HOLINESS NOR JOY. So, let's aim for holiness, and experience joy!

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St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
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(Note: this sermon was slightly modified based on what actually happened.)