

July 23, 2017 Sunday Sermon, Seventh Sunday of the Pentecost Season

Sermon Text: Romans 7:15-25a

Sermon Theme: Who will rescue me?

*I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. <sup>16</sup> And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup> As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. <sup>18</sup> I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. <sup>19</sup> For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup> Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.*

*<sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*

We live in an age of heroes. The comic book heroes that were so popular in the 40's, 50's and 60's have come to life on TV and in the movies. There is a hero for everyone. There are male heroes, female heroes, teen heroes, and heroes of every color, shape and variety imaginable.

But even though there are so many heroes and just as many villains, the story line remains the same. The villain causes trouble and puts people into danger. The normal lines of protection like the police and the army are ineffective. The people are looking for help, for someone to save them. In comes the hero and saves the day.

In our sermon text for today, Paul is calling out for help just like those comic book people, **“Who will rescue me?”** Just like those people he is under attack. He needs help. As we listen to Paul's words, we see that Paul is not talking about something that is dangerous only to himself, he is talking about something that affects each and every one of us. He is talking about the dangers of sin and death. Although we may battle sin every day, our methods often fail and we lose. We need a hero. Who will rescue us from our sins that lead to eternal death?

The first words of our sermon text may sound familiar to us because they may have gone through our own heads from time to time, **“Why do I do these things?” I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.**

Even though we think we understand ourselves so well, there are many times we don't understand why we continue to sin. We love the Lord, we want to do good and follow his Law, but instead of following it we find ourselves sinning against the Lord. Some of those sins are old ones that we have struggled with for years. Some are new sins that have only crept up in recently. The more we study God's Word, the more we hear his Law, the more it shows us how sinful and far away from following God we are. We do the things that we hate and not the things we want to do, why is that?

In the Psalms David tells us, **“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”** When we lived in our old house off of Hillpointe, there were three trees growing in a grassy area between the our neighbor's wall and the street.

Because the trees were planted on a slight hill, the trees did not grow straight and true. They had begun to tilt toward the road as they grew. They tried to fix it by putting anchors in the wall and then using chords and ropes and come-alongs to pull those trees back to straight and true.

David says that like those trees, we don't grow straight and true towards our God. Instead, by nature we are sinful. We grow away from the Lord and towards sin. We need an anchor, we need something that continuously pulls us back to the way of the Lord, so that we will grow straight and true in his way.

Paul says that the Law can be one of those things that pulls us back. **If I do what I do not want to do, I agree the Law is good.** The Law can be a blessing for us. It can show us what we are doing is wrong. It shows us what our sins actually are. The Law can point us to what is right in the eyes of the Lord and it shows us we are not doing it. The Law is good because it shows us to live in God-pleasing way we need help. We need a hero.

Paul says <sup>17</sup> **As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.** <sup>18</sup> **I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.** <sup>19</sup> **For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.** <sup>20</sup> **Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.**

As we listen to these words, it almost sounds like Paul is trying to make his sins not so sinful. Maybe like a child answering why they did something naughty. “Why did you take the cookie? The devil made me do it.” Paul says, “Why do I sin? It’s not me, it’s sin living in me.”

We often sound like a naughty child when we are confronted by our sins don’t we.

We use a great many excuses about why our sins aren’t actually sins, “God understands why I do this.” “Maybe for someone else it is wrong, but for me, God is OK with it.” We try to justify our sins. “Nobody thinks this is a sin, why can’t I do it.” “I’m not hurting anyone with this sin, as long as nobody gets hurt, it’s not really a sin.” We try to shift the blame for our sin. “If you wouldn’t have done this, I would never have done that to you.” We try to hide out sins. “As long as nobody finds out that I am doing this, I do not have to admit it is a sin.”

When Paul says he sins because sin is living in him, he is not trying shift the blame, he is not trying to justify his sins, he is not trying rationalize his actions to be less sinful. Paul is stating a truth. We have a sinful nature that lives inside of us. This sinful nature is very strong. When we try to battle this enemy with our own strength the results are obvious. The evil we do not want to do, we keep on doing.

Paul continues. **So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.** Sin is always there. It is not something that we can eradicate, it is not something that we can kill or destroy. The devil is always there waiting for the times when we are ripe for temptation. He is good at getting us to lower our defenses so that when he does tempt us we are not ready for it.

Sin and evil are always with us and they are always dangerous. Sin is like the chained dog which lives next door. Anytime we walk outside of our house, anytime there is a visitor to the house, the dog growls and snaps, straining to break the chain and attack. But as long as it is chained, we can convince ourselves that the dog is safe. As long as it doesn’t growl, snap, or bite us, we can tolerate it. But is it really safe for us to have that dog next to us? No it’s not.

Paul says that even though he wants to do what is right and good, sin is right there ready to snap and snarl at him when we wants that. Sin is ready to bite him by turning his good thoughts and intentions into sinful ones, sin is ready to attack him when his defenses are down and he has no help.

There is a war that is going on inside of each of us. As Christians who hear and study God’s Word it is our sincere desire to live according to his ways. As Paul says, **We delight in the Law of the Lord.** We can see this love for the Lord on Sunday. We don’t hear the Word of God and leave his house thinking we don’t want to do that. We leave wanting to do what the Lord has said.

But we have that sinful nature which lives inside of us and before we know it we are right back to our sinful habits. Paul is right in saying that our sinful nature wages a war against our faith every hour, every minute, every second. The devil fights the hardest against those who believe in Jesus.

While we are in this world we will never stop being attacked by the devil and because that sin lives inside of us, because it is waiting next to us like a chained dog. We are prisoners who will never be able to escape it using our own strength, our own reason, or our own methods.

Paul doesn’t give us a list of new things to try that will free us from this problem of sin. No matter how he battled sin, he was still a slave to sin just as we are. Paul’s answer must also be our answer. **What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?** <sup>25</sup> **Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

It’s very important that we include the first part of Paul’s answer. Paul doesn’t say, “Look, what a good man I am.” He doesn’t say, “Look, how hard I’ve tried.” He doesn’t say, “I’m not as bad as you.” Part of the answer to the problem of sin is to realize how awful we really are. It is to call out with Paul, **I am not good enough to earn or deserve anything from my God when I sin against him, I know that nothing good lives in me. Please Lord, save me from my sinful wretched state.**

Many times we don’t think we are that bad. We don’t rate ourselves as 10’s on the scale of sins we commit. We are fooling ourselves into false hope and a false security. Paul loved the Law because it showed

him his sin was not just one or two things, it showed how hopelessly lost in sin he was. He calls himself a wretched man, a man without hope. He needed help, he needed a hero.

But Paul loved the Gospel even more. In the Gospel, God showed Paul and he shows us our hero, our Savior, Jesus who rescues us. **Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Jesus did something heroic for us. It was much greater than saving us from a burning building, an alien invasion, or another harrowing experience. Our Savior, Jesus, saves us, wretched sinners, from the death in hell we deserve because of our sins.

Our God showed heroic mercy, a love greater than we would ever show when he loved sinful, selfish people like you and me. Thanks be to God, that he did not want us to go to hell, but loved us enough to send Jesus our hero. Jesus took our place on the cross and suffered the punishment we deserved. He gives us the gifts that he won of the cross. Thanks be to God that although we continue sinning, our hero continues to intercede for us today. Even now he is our champion in heaven, who stands before the throne of God reminding God that our sins are forgiven.

Who will save us from the sin and death we deserve? Not us, we need help. We have our help, our hero who has saved us from the punishment we deserved. We have a Savior who has taken us from the greatest danger of eternal death and given us new life with him. Thanks be to God, through our hero and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.