

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost
July 27, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 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. 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. 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. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 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. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The word hate is a strong and ugly word, but in this case it is fitting when I say there are times I hate myself. There are occasions I feel like the former comedian Chris Farley who used to make me laugh when he would say to himself “*stupid, stupid, stupid.*” When you blow up and lose your temper with your children and feel like the worst parent ever. The nights you lay your head down on the pillow and reflect on how you showed absolutely no patience or understanding with your spouse that evening. The guilt weighs heavy on your heart. The times words come out of your mouth and now there is no taking them back and you wonder why you ever said them and you wish you never did. You feel terrible. I think each one of you would agree that many times we are our own worst enemies.

We could admit this because it is true – one of our enemies is us. People have referred to our three main spiritual enemies as the unholy trinity. There is the devil, Satan who prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour us. There is the world with all of its evil desires and sinful temptations. Then there is the enemy that lives closest to home – because it lives in us and has since we were born into this world. This is what we call our old Adam or our sinful nature. There is nothing good in our sinful nature. It desires what is contrary to the Holy Spirit. It opposes God and God’s will for us. The sinful nature in short leads us to sin. This can be frustrating. This can be discouraging. It might even lead us to proclaim with the apostle Paul: What a wretched person I am!

So in every one of us we have this ongoing struggle against our own sinful self. We have a battle that will never stop on this side of heaven. As we turn to God’s Word where Paul reminds us of this very real conflict inside of every Christian I want us to consider this question: **How will we ever win the war against ourselves?**

It is tough to think of anyone who had a greater change in life than Paul. His complete turnaround is well documented. He went from persecutor and blasphemer to preacher and proclaimer. The one who sought to kill Christians was now trying to convert people to become Christian so they might be saved. This former enemy of Jesus was now Christ’s apostle and missionary. Paul no longer lived for himself but for Jesus who lived and died for him. Many times we even look to Paul as an example, as a model for what we want to do and how we want to live as Christians.

But Paul makes it clear that he is still far from perfect. He still falls way short of the glory of God in his everyday life. Paul understands why. Listen as Paul, in almost a Dr. Seuss tongue twisting manner, describes the ongoing conflict within him. ***“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good...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. 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.”*** Do you understand what Paul is saying? Can you relate? Paul does not approve of everything he does. Sometimes he hates what he does. The bad things he does not want to do he does. The good things he wants to do he doesn't do. Yes, the evil he wants to avoid he keeps on doing!

Again can we relate? Perhaps we call them our pet sins, or our sins of weakness we keep going back to. Maybe we have trouble controlling our tongues with improper words that keep slipping out. Perhaps we have fallen into a pattern of laziness, apathy, or indifference that we are struggling to get out of. We, like Paul, might understand what God says, want to do avoid the evil God tells us to avoid, and want to do the good God wants us to do, but somehow we often find ourselves doing the opposite. Why is this?

We go back to the enemy that lives in us – our sinful nature. Paul writes, ***“As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature... So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.”*** Please understand Paul is not saying this as some kind of cop out. He is not rationalizing his sin by saying *“it's really not my fault – it's just my sinful nature.”* He certainly isn't using his sinful nature as an excuse to keep on sinning. Paul is just acknowledging a very real battle he faces against his sinful nature every single day. Paul is admitting that he too often loses battle after battle after battle against this foe.

Can you hear his frustration and disappointment in these words? ***“For in my inner being I delight in God's law; 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. What a wretched man I am!”*** Because of Paul's sinful nature he doesn't stand a chance. On his own the war against himself would be lost and Paul knows it and asks, ***“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*** Yes, ***“Who will rescue me from this body of death?”*** How will we ever win the war against ourselves? ***“Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!”***

Paul understood how the victory was his – even over himself. He won because of Jesus. Jesus gave him the victory – with His perfect life – with His death on the cross for his sins – with a triumph even over the grave. Jesus clothed Paul in righteousness at his baptism. Jesus assured Paul again and again that all his sins were forgiven. Jesus gave Paul a new self, a new self as Paul writes in Ephesians – ***“created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”*** (4) This is why as you read these verses again carefully you hear Paul talk the way he does. The new, real him is not the one doing bad things and failing to do what is good. For the new self always listens to and obeys God. The new self in Paul is the reason there is a battle in the first place. Yes, ***Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!***

My prayer is that we join Paul in giving thanks today. We have been given the same victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. We have the same answer to our sin and all the frustrations and disappointments our sinful nature causes in our lives. The answer is Jesus who invites, ***“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest!”*** (Matthew 11) When we feel and act stupid, when we start to hate ourselves, how awesome it is

to remember Jesus loves you - so much that His cross was for you so that all your sins are removed forever. When we lose battle after battle with our sinful nature and confess “*what a wretched person I am,*” remember what Jesus has made you in your baptism – a child of God, holy and righteous in His sight. When we need help in our daily struggle, remember Jesus is with us and His word & sacrament is here to strengthen and guide us so that we win more and more of those daily battles against sin. When we begin to wonder who will rescue us and how we will ever win the war when one of our fiercest enemies is ourselves, may we repeat all the louder with Paul: ***Thanks be to God--through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** Amen.