

7/5/2020
Romans 7:15-25a

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Sermon

This text is so vulnerable. Reading these words feels, to me, like we're reading a journal entry out of the Apostle Paul's personal journal, don't you think? We don't know the particular situation he was going through, but with these words, Paul describes here the perplexing struggle any person can experience with sin. The verses here could probably describe any one of us as we struggle with our own sin. For every one of us there are things we do or say that we know we shouldn't, but... we do or say them anyway.

Our story with this the perplexing sin problem is actually the oldest story in the book. Our story starts all the way back at the beginning of the book of Genesis with our fore-parents Adam and Eve. God created humanity to care for the land, enjoy creation, and thrive in relationship with each other and with God,

himself. God placed them in a garden to have this thriving life and they were able to eat of any of the trees - *any* of the trees – except they were not supposed to eat from the one tree – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God told them that if they ate from that one particular tree, the consequence would be death. These humans were fully aware of this rule and understood it fine until...until they heard a different story. A shrewd snake told Adam and Eve that they surely wouldn't die if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And instead of continuing to believe God, when they are confronted with this countering idea, they chose to believe the snake instead of their Creator, the author of their very lives. And with the bite of fruit they knew they shouldn't take, their world was changed in an instant. Relationship with each other and relationship with God would never be the same.

And then these ugly and unfortunate consequences take effect in their own two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain's jealousy grew so powerful and overwhelming toward Abel that Cain chose to kill his own brother, illustrating for us how sin can take a foothold in our lives and lead to dire and extreme outcomes, if not kept in check.

And the list of humanity's sins goes on and on throughout the whole Biblical narrative. BUT God's rescue plan for humanity began in Genesis, too and travels throughout all the books of the Old Testament, pointing us toward God's ultimate solution – Jesus.

Now before we go on with our Biblical story and talk more about Jesus, I want to ask you today, have you ever been in a situation when you knew you should have done something in obedience to God but you chose to not do it? Or have you ever been in a situation when you did something that you knew you shouldn't have done? How did it work out for you?

I'll share with you one of those kinds of stories from my own life. When I was growing up, my mom and I had an understanding that if I were to get a bad grade (meaning a C or lower) on my report card, I would be grounded for the whole duration of the next quarter of school. Being an only child, not being allowed to go to friends houses or have friends come over was hard, so it should have been some good motivation to not get bad grades! Well, for the last quarter of 8th grade, I got a D – yes, a big whopping D – on my report card for English class. So to follow through on our deal, my mom grounded me for the whole summer. But she made it a bit more interesting. I would be allowed to see my friends only *after* I wrote her 3 one-page, double-spaced reports *a day* on topics of my choosing. Since my bad grade was in the subject of English, she chose a punishment that could actually aid in my learning. Well, of course I didn't understand that as a kid, and I *hated* writing those papers. Ugh, it was excruciating. I'd surf the web for hours trying to figure out what to write about and how to fill a page on three different subjects.

Now here's where the story takes a turn. So, as I was researching for these assignments, I began copying and pasting phrases I particularly liked. That

was ok, right? But then I realized that I could copy a whole sentence here and there to make my writing process go a little quicker. I knew I shouldn't, but I hated writing those papers! "It'll be fine. Mom will never notice," I said to myself. But then, I began taking chunks of multiple sentences, and sooner or later, I was copying and pasting whole paragraphs. I knew I shouldn't, but I did it anyway. I talked myself into believing that it was ok – that the pain of writing those papers was worth the risk in plagiarizing others' works, calling them my own.

Well, my mom is a very smart woman. When she got home after work and read my assignments, I'm sure she easily recognized the sentence structure of these papers were not the work of her 13 year old daughter. And so, I vividly remember hearing my mother's voice bellow from the kitchen, down the hall, into my room, the dreaded 3 named call – "Victoria Ruth Moody" followed by the words, "come out here, *please*."

I walked out of my room and toward her as she sat at the kitchen table with papers laying out in front of her. The papers had highlights *all* over them. She had, of course, done a simple Google search of a sentence from my papers, found the articles I had stolen from, printed out those articles, and highlighted all the similarities between my assignments and the original articles. I swear, I can think back to that moment and my heart starts to beat faster. All she had to do was look at me and I knew I was in deep trouble. She asked me to explain myself and all I remember from what I said was "waaaaaa" *crying noises*. God bless my mother.

After many tears, apologies, and some more tears, my gracious mother ended up having mercy on me. She heard how difficult it was for me to write the papers, and dropped my assignment down to 2 papers a day. But she also told me how disappointed she was in me (which was the worst punishment of all) and gave me a very firm talking to about the consequences of plagiarism in school or work settings. Oh yeah, did I mention my mom was a college professor who caught kids plagiarizing at least once a semester? Yeah...

I want to say that I was either really dumb or naive, and maybe those statements are true of my 13 year of self, but when I really think about it, I knew I shouldn't have done what I did, and I chose to do it anyway. The thing I didn't want to do, I did, and the thing I wanted to do (writing the papers with integrity), I didn't do. Sin is sneaky and it doesn't care who it's victim is. From Adam and Eve to our great-grandparents, to our grandparents, to our parents, to you and to me – we've all got the sin problem. The things we don't want to do, we do, and the things we want to do, we choose not to do. We all have the perplexing sin problem and just like the Apostle Paul, each of us come to a time and place in our lives when we ask the question from our scripture today, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Who will rescue us from the spiral of sin that seems to never end in our lives? Who will save us from believing the story that is counter to God's will for our lives? Who will stop us from the deterioration of our relationships because of choices we make that are hurtful or wrong? Who will

free us from this law of sin and death? And not only that, but who will help us choose the way of life?

Jesus. God's rescue plan is Jesus. Through God's Spirit, God sent Jesus to be born of a human, grow as a human, live as a human, and die as a human to finally set us free from the captivity of sin and death. God's amazing work in this world was not to cast us aside like damaged goods, but was instead to draw as near to us as possible. *God became human in Jesus to redeem our humanity.* Jesus followed the will of our Heavenly Father, Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus touched and healed the untouchable, Jesus forgave, Jesus did not give in to Satan's temptations, and Jesus gave his life for the sake of the world – for you and for me. 2 Corinthians 5:21 sums this amazing grace up so well when it says, "For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." And I love the Message Version's paraphrase of this verse; it says, "*Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you.²¹ How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God.*"

Jesus wants to set us free. Do you want to be set free? It sounds like a simple question with an obvious answer, but as our scripture reading shows (and as our personal experience with sin validates) we know that being freed from sin can be no easy thing. Jesus followers, of course, are more well equipped to slam the door in Sin's face, but we deal with temptations all the time, just as Jesus,

himself, dealt with temptations, too. So as Christians, how do we effectively slam the door in Sin's face? If you have your Bible's with you or if you have a Bible app on your phone, turn to Ephesians, chapter 6. The section might be familiar to you – it's the section that describes to us the Armor of God.

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Wow, that section of scripture is always so encouraging and exciting to read. It really gets me pumped up. It reminds of those T-shirts that you may have seen that say, "Not today, Satan." I feel like under our breastplate of

righteousness, we should all make sure to wear a “Not today, Satan” T-shirt. This section of scripture really helps us remember that sin is serious business that takes serious and strong protection – as strong as armor in warfare.

When we ask Jesus to come into our hearts and reign over our lives, we get to turn in those shackles of sin that keep us captive for the armor of God. We trade in those chains of greed, anger, self-centeredness, and deceit for truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation and the power of the Spirit.

The verses that comes directly after our scripture reading (Romans 8:1-4) say this: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life *has set you free from the law of sin and death.* ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh,⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

So...do you want to be free? Do you want Jesus to set you free? Do you want to turn in your shackles for armor? If you do, would you please pray with me? Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that your word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path that guides us in life. Lord, inspire in us a

desire to stay in your word in order to find truth, righteousness, peace, salvation and your Spirit. And God, we thank you for your Word who was made flesh in the person of Jesus. We thank you that you sent Jesus who did not know sin to be sin for us so that we might be made clean, pure, and spotless. Jesus, we thank you for the example of your life and the gift of everlasting life you've given us through your death on the cross. Help us to start living everlasting life today. Save us from our sin. Rescue us from ourselves. We want to be free. Jesus, today for either the first time ever or the first time today, we give our lives to you. Through your Spirit, to the glory of the Father, in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

For Benediction:

There's a story about a twelve year old boy who accidentally killed one of his family's geese by throwing a stone. Figuring his parents wouldn't notice one of twenty-four gone he buried it. But his sister saw his crime and said, "I saw what you did, and if you don't wash the dishes for me, I'll tell mom." The boy did the dishes for days. One day, the boy said, "You do them." His sister said, "I'll tell mom." The boy replied, "I already told her and she forgave me – I'm free again."