

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
05 July 2020 – Pentecost 5

OPENING PRAYER

We thank you God for being with us each and every day - and especially being present with us in a special way on this day - as we gather to worship you and hear your word. We ask your blessing upon our assembly. Be swift to answer the prayers of our hearts and our lips and receive from our hands all that is due to you on this Holy and blessed day and in this holy and blessed place. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

SONG* [Spirit song](#) CCLI 27848

PSALM 45:10,-17

10 Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear;
forget your people and your father's house,
11 and the king will desire your beauty.
Since he is your lord, bow to him;
12 the people^[a] of Tyre will seek your favour with gifts,
the richest of the people 13 with all kinds of wealth.
The princess is decked in her chamber with gold-woven robes;^[b]
14 in many-colored robes she is led to the king;
behind her the virgins, her companions, follow.
15 With joy and gladness they are led along
as they enter the palace of the king.
16 In the place of ancestors you, O king,^[c] shall have sons;
you will make them princes in all the earth.
17 I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations;
therefore the peoples will praise you forever and ever.

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Joyous Creator, you bless us beyond all reason,
that we might give all that we have (and all we are) in service to you.
You speak hope to our hearts,
so that we might hear the cries of your little ones in our midst.
Your love is celebrated in all generations,

Servant of the weary, you befriend all the outsiders of every time and place;
you lead us by the right way, if we would but follow;
you rescue us from our foolish wisdom, carrying us like babies into the kingdom.
Your grace is revealed to every generation,

Spirit of rest, you are the goodness from which we draw life;
you are the comforter who warms us when death's chill comes;
you are the common sense which helps us to live God's gracious ways.
Your peace is celebrated through all generations,

In every generation, in our generation,
we would sing your praises forever and ever,
God in Community, Holy in One, even as we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy Jesus, we confess to you that we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves. We have labelled them crazy, junkie, illegal, sick, and criminal. By our labels we have dismissed them and washed our hands clean of needing to care for them, let alone love them. We have broken your greatest commandment.

Forgive us for not seeing our fellow citizen in the reign of God, our brother, our sister, our family in you. Forgive us for not loving, as you have loved us. In your name we pray and seek forgiveness. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Who will deliver us from this body of death,
and from the law of sin at work within us?
Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lifts the heavy burden of sin we are carrying
and gives rest to our souls.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [The Power of Your Love](#) CCLI 917491

BIBLE READINGS

[Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67](#)

[Romans 7:15-25a](#)

[Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30](#)

SERMON [The “normal” Christian life](#) sermon.mp3

SONG [Come as you are](#) CCLI 7017790

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord - we come unto you - and we lift up our burdens to you - our worry - our anxiety - our fear - our tiredness - our pain - and we ask that would remove them from us put in their place your burden and your yoke. Help us to learn from you and to rejoice in you and to serve you that we may find the rest that you have promised. Make us your captives so that we might be truly free.

Father - we come to you to this day not only for ourselves - but for others - for those who do not know your peace - for those who have not yet found any rest - for those who struggle with those things we have brought to you. We ask your healing to be upon those who are sick - your strength to be with those who are tired - your wisdom and your love to be with those who live with despair and fear. Minister to them as we minister to them - help us to bring them to you.

We pray too today O God for your blessing to be upon our congregation and upon our church, and for your presence to be seen vividly in what we and our brothers and sisters in Christ do each day. We pray that your joy and your love will flow freely in us and thru us as we take up your yoke and follow where you lead us.

This morning, we pray especially for...

Gentle and humble Lord, provide rest for these weary souls.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Shout to the Lord](#) CCLI 1406918

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

Go now at the call of Christ.

Take his yoke upon you and learn from him;

Dance when he sings and mourn when he cries.

Be generous in your hospitality to all.

*Songs chosen by Ros B

THE 'NORMAL' CHRISTIAN LIFE

Pentecost 5 Year A

Gn. 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67; Ps. 45:10-17; Rom. 7:15-25a; Mt. 11:16-19, 25-30

05/07/2020

In today's reading from his letter to the Romans, The Apostle Paul cuts to the heart of what it means to live the "normal" Christian life. I have placed the word "normal" in inverted commas for a specific reason because one would think that what Paul is describing here—the war within oneself between what we want to do and know we should do...and what we actually end up doing—ought not to be the way life is for a Christian—ought not to be "normal".

The Christian life—the life that has been turned around and re-formatted (to use computer terminology)—the life that has invited Christ to live within—ought to be one that is inspired by the Holy Spirit and lived out in constant, faithful obedience to God. That's certainly the ideal. What we find in reality, however, is often very different. We all know this to be true, don't we?

Take, for example, someone—some random hypothetical person—who has been on vacation for say...2 months. When they return to work, they know what they have to do—all the jobs are lined up—all the tasks are on the "to do" list—but the habit of just doing what you want, when you want to, is really hard to overcome. You know what you have to do but it can be really hard to get to it.

So, this unending struggle that somehow dwells within us, is the common experience for all of us. We constantly find ourselves overwhelmed by our failure to live up to even the most reasonable of expectations. Most Christians, in fact, are plagued by this situation, which eats away at us and undermines our assurance of salvation.

This problem is compounded if our Christian circle tends toward a more legalistic interpretation of the Christian life. If we're taught to live our Christian lives in an environment where expectations are laid on us to please Jesus, then the problem gets worse. The more we place ourselves under the Law—the more we try to force compliance—the more we attempt to live according to the rules—the more we find ourselves slaves to sin.

The problem is even further compounded if we attempt to apply denial techniques in the way we handle guilt. If we think this way, then we end up reinterpreting or denying our own sinfulness. This was the sin of the Pharisees who believed that the rigid keeping of the Law made them righteous before God. The simple fact is that all of us—every believer—possesses a nature that is at odds with our renewed Christian nature. So then, what assurance can we find—what hope do we have—for our eternal salvation in this condition of ours?

Why is it that Christians—that we—are so helpless to do what we not only know to be the right thing to do, but also what, as Christians, we want to do? Why is Paul's statement so universal: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." There's a great conflict within ourselves. We know what we should do and yet we don't do it. And on the other hand, we often do those things that we know we should not do.

We know the traffic laws, and no one would argue that they're not necessary, but most of us still bend them a little, from time to time, usually for no good reason. We know its

wrong to gossip but most of us enjoy talking about the shortcomings of other people. We know we're called by God to be a people of love, but we still despise some people and look down on them. We know that we're doing wrong by not loving them, and yet it's difficult to correct ourselves and change our attitudes.

In today's passage, Paul speaks of this situation when he said, "What I hate, I do." The great conflict in Paul is also in us. We all experience within ourselves the spiritual warfare of knowing something is wrong, but doing it never the less. We're like the ancient poet who said, "I see the better things, and I approve of them, but I choose to do the worse."

How many of us are not aware of this inner struggle—this great conflict? How many of us cannot agree with Paul when he says: "I do not understand my own actions."

Having posed the problem—the existence of the conflict within us all, Paul considers the cause of the problem. It's not because the Law is bad or somewhat deficient—it's not because we lack respect for the Law and the instructions that God has given us. Paul tells us, in fact, that the Law is good—and that it's something he delights in. The Law helps us define what is good and what is bad and shows us what we should do and how we should act. And yet, even Paul still had this day-to-day conflict of good and evil going on inside him.

The cause of our conflict and wrongdoing is much deeper than our attitude to the law. The cause of our conflict is—according to Paul—sin—sin dwelling within us. Why do we fail to do those good things we would like to do? Why do we do the bad things we don't want to do? We see the better and approve of it, and yet we do the worse.

Why? It is sin, says Paul—sin that has taken up residence within us. And simply put, sin is out of character for the believer. It ought not to be, but there it is.

Leon Morris in his commentary on Paul's letter to the Romans, states,

It is all too easy to take our Christian status for granted. We so readily remember our victories and gloss over our defeats. We slip into a routine and refuse to allow ourselves to be disturbed by what we see as occasional and minor slips. But a sensitive conscience and a genuine sorrow for every sin are the prerequisites of spiritual depth. (Morris, 296)

Paul's own words reflect the problem: "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?" (7:23-24)

Paul's dilemma is the human dilemma. The struggle all of us go through in the battle between good and evil—between right and wrong choices, thoughts and actions. Just because we have the resolve to accomplish a goal, it doesn't mean that we will succeed. It's really hard to maintain your Christian resolve 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Desire will wax and wane. Some days our desire to live in obedience to God will be intense while other days the desire will not be evident.

For Paul, knowing what he wants to do but cannot do, and being unable to do what is right even though it's his greatest desire, prompts him to ask the ultimate question—the question that ought to be on all our lips, "Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

Who will set me free from this war that wages within my soul? Who will bring peace and hope in the midst of turmoil and despair?

Well, Paul sees the hope for his predicament in one person and one person only—Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the solution to the internal struggle that wages inside of us. Since the first man and the first woman defiantly choose to separate themselves from their Creator, God has been working through history to liberate his people from the enslaving power of sin. But freedom from sin does not come by simply knowing that fact. Freedom does not come because we make a commitment to change. Freedom does not come until a person is willing to place their total and complete trust in one person.

The good news of God's goodness is that Christ brings a new power into this hopeless situation—a power that liberates us from the captivity of sin. Assurance in our eternal salvation is not dependent on our victory over indwelling sin, but on Christ's victory on the cross. As Paul assures us elsewhere, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" and "he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you."

As we open ourselves in faith to God's love and mercy, which offers us a relationship of forgiveness, and growth in confidence, we move from death to life—we move from an environment of hopelessness and despair towards a life of freedom from sin and guilt and death. That freedom then liberates us to live and to love and forgive and bless others as God wants us to. Love reproduces love and for Paul love is the fulfilling of the Law. That is how to get there—not by trying harder to obey good commandments but by putting your faith in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 7 and verse 24 Paul gives voice to the hopelessness that threatens us: "Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" His good news answers: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (7:25a). Christ and his sacrifice on the cross is all the assurance we need of our righteousness and acceptance before God.

To him be all the glory, honour and praise. Amen.