

Pentecost 3a – Romans 7:15-25a, “The battle raging within”

Read: ¹⁸ *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.* ¹⁹ *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...Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.* ²² *For in my inner being I delight in God’s law;* ²³ *but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.* ²⁴ *What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?*

- 1. Even for Christian men and women - it’s really difficult to admit fault.** Can we agree on that? Husbands – wives – children – friends – everybody!! It’s difficult for us as people to admit fault.

Even when we know we should apologize, it takes a huge effort (and a raging internal battle) to go to another person (even as a Christian) and say, *“I was wrong, I have sinned against you and I’m sorry – will you please forgive me?”*

It doesn’t come naturally and so we resist it. You could even make the case that we’ve been taught not to do it – which is a great excuse for not apologizing. How often do we as people naturally avoid admitting fault these days lest we end up in court!? In any kind of motor vehicle accident we’re instructed by the insurance companies not to admit fault. Just pass on your details, and let the insurance company work it out.

What we do tend to find easier is apologizing using key qualifying words like – if & but. *“If I offended you (which probably means you’re being way too sensitive) – then I’m sorry.”* How does that go down in most households? Or, *“I’m sorry that I snapped at you BUT you provoked me by giving me that nagging stare.”* Would this count as an apology at your house?

Anyway...isn’t it usually someone else’s fault when we’re upset? Maybe we are all perfect people. Should I say amen and sit down!?

The point is the battles that rage around us – like we’ve just been talking about, often reflect the battle raging within (inside) each one of us.

- 2. So what’s going on inside us?** Why do we find ourselves even experiencing these internal battles or inner conflicts that Paul talks about in Romans 7? What happens to us as Christians? Paul says in v18, ¹⁸ *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature (flesh). For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.*

I think Paul is struggling with the fact that he knows full well he’s been renewed and cleansed through his faith in Jesus and his cross. He’s a Christian - but here he is taking stock of his life and finding that he’s struggling to live according to his calling and doing things he knows aren’t in alignment with God’s revealed will for his life.

He loves God and knows God loves him back – but he’s frustrated that he can’t seem to get the traction he wants in his Christian life. And so here he is throwing his arms up in the air and saying, *“what a wretched man that I am!”* I admire his honesty...

Do you find yourself in similar situations to Paul? Do you get frustrated sometimes when you find yourself thinking and saying and doing things you know are destructive to your journey as a Christian? You want to live in the will of God – according to his Word, but you struggle, like Paul to get traction. And so we find ourselves crying out:

- *Why did I lie instead of being completely honest!?*
- *Why aren’t I respecting my body? Why did I look at that web page or send that text?*
- *Why am I not teachable or willing to come under any kind of authority?*
- *Why do I have to have my own way - all the time?*

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- *Why did I open my mouth and say things I had no right to say about that person?*
- *Why can't I get past these thoughts that are leading me deeper and deeper into unhelpful patterns of behavior!?*

Have a think about that - your own thought life, your interactions with other people, the situations or patterns you struggle with most often. When do you, like Paul throw your arms up in the air or let out a deep sigh? When does your Christian journey leave you struggling like Paul and feeling discouraged and disappointed with yourself?

- 3. We can all find comfort today (regardless of where we're at) in the fact that there is no such thing as a super Christian or perfect Christian.** Throughout history there have been people who claimed to have no sin and who thought they'd attained perfection. I'd prefer to listen to another Apostle named John who writes, *“If we claim we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us...”* Even St Paul struggled in his baptismal journey the same way you and I do.

That's because there's a common issue we've all inherited – which isn't so comforting! We call it original sin – but what does this mean? Does it just mean we do bad stuff sometimes? Are we evil people? Did God create us this way? What's going on?

Original sin is the name given to the deep corruption that has been passed down our family line from our first parents Adam and Eve all the way to you and me. It's a corruption so deep, that we're not even equipped to say where it begins and ends. It's not God's handy-work, it's Satan's continuing work of corruption that has been passed on from generation to generation (parent to child) from the 3rd chapter of Genesis through to all of us.

That means you're not an evil creation. It means other people are not created evil or for evil. It means that we are all created in the image of God and to live in community together, but have a foreign intruder (often known & named in Scripture as the Old Adam) at work in us. And this *'Old Adam or deep corruption'* we're all stuck with, doesn't like us very much and creates all kinds of havoc!

So for Christians that results in this ***internal battle within*** that Paul and every Christian throughout human history has struggled with, and that we're engaged in on a daily basis (even today).

The new you, renewed and reborn through baptism & faith in Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit is constantly struggling against this deep corruption that still clings to us this side of heaven. And it's not a simple or easy matter. It causes us and those around us pain and hardship – which makes it important for us to understand what's happening to us and what the root cause is.

- 4. Now for all the men here today – what do we like to do once a problem has been identified?** We go to the shed, grab our toolbox and have a think about how we might fix the problem! Men are fixers – we can't help it! Women are too – they just go about it differently. Women talk things out where men like to use tools. Here's the issue though. There is no spanner capable of fixing our original sin problem and no amount of talking or listening to each other will solve it either!

But we can rejoice with St Paul today as we cry out to God in unison with Paul saying, *“Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

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God knows that daily struggles require daily help and healing! As we come to God bruised and battered by the struggles we all get entangled in, he continues to dispense the Spiritual medicine we need in order to keep walking our journey of faith.

Listen to Jesus' word to you this morning: ²⁸ *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*¹

This invitation from Jesus to all of us is a standing invitation. It doesn't matter whether we're frustrated by the conflict of striving to live as Christians, or whether we're dealing with guilt or shame, disappointment or anger or hurts – Jesus invites us to come to **him** and find rest for our souls with Him.

Not just comfy arm chair or mattress rest – but real rest for our souls that meets our deepest needs and transforms our approach to life.

The continual fight against the pull of original sin (Old Adam) in our lives requires the continual assurance from Jesus that our sins are forgiven in His name.

The power of Jesus word of forgiveness spoken into our lives is far greater than the power of Old Adam at work in our lives. The cross of Jesus and His mighty resurrection show us exactly that. Ultimately, sin and death have already been defeated by this mighty act of God.

Jesus continues to invite you to come to him and he continues to speak His words of cleansing and strength and renewal into your life. He points you to His cross again and again because it's the way God has dealt with sin once and for all.

And although Jesus died once on the cross – the power of what He did continues to ripple through generation after generation of God's people - to you and all of us gathered here today.

The rippling power of the cross is at work freeing us from sin's power today; it's at work binding the corruption of the Old Adam deep within us today and pointing us to live and walk once again in the forgiveness and love of God.

- 5. God does it this way because in His perfect wisdom He knows exactly what we need.** It's not more accountability partners or self-help books or worldly wisdom that free us from the pain of sin at work in our Christian lives – it's the continued assurance and application of the cross's power that brings relief and rest from the battle raging in us and outside of us.

That's why we keep remembering what it is that **God does** in our baptism and what **God brings to the table** when we receive Him in Holy Communion.

Only God can free us from the burden and accusation of sin and the devil – and God does that for you and me and invites us to keep coming to Him and finding real rest and real peace that transforms both our lives and our perspective of the world and each other.

I want to close today by reading you a bit of practical advice on dealing with the challenges we've looked at today.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1996 (electronic ed.) (Mt 11:28–30). Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI

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This morning I'm using *'Timeless Bible Truths: The Illustrated SC'* that we use in H2H Confirmation ministry (pg 22 Timeless Bible Truths – 'fourth part: What does baptism mean for daily living?')

(READ)...

This is our response to the good news of what God has done for each of us at the font. In your baptism God hasn't only claimed your life as His own, he's also given you the tools you need **to continually drown that Old Adam**...and begin each new day in the victory of the cross. This glorifies God and satisfies our every real need. Amen.

Pray: Lord, your word affirms the reality that we live in every day – that there is a battle raging within each one of us. Please continue your work in us that we would know and live in the victory you have won for us on the cross. Show us and apply to us your victory over sin again today. Come and fill us again as we come in a few moments to gather around your table. May you be glorified as all our needs are satisfied in you today. We pray in Jesus' name: Amen!