

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 23 – October 24<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013

### **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!**

Dear Friends in Christ,

If you were going to make a list of the top five people of the Bible as far as how strong their faith is, who would you put on that list? That would be a pretty tough list, wouldn't it? I think I would put Abraham on that list. Most likely Moses. Maybe Elijah or Samuel? Would you put Esther or Mary, the mother of Jesus, on that list? Would King David make it or what about Noah? Ruth certainly gets some consideration. Would Joseph or Daniel make your list? What about the Apostle Paul?

As you can see from this little discussion, it would be very difficult to choose just 5 people. It is difficult for a couple of reasons. It is difficult, because there are so many people from the Bible who showed their strong faith. On the other hand, this is a difficult task, because all of the people we just talked about were sinful people who didn't always place their complete trust in God. These people, as strong as they were, sinned and fell short of being perfect. They didn't always loved God above all things. They didn't always treat their neighbors as themselves. There were times in the lives of these people that we wouldn't want to copy?

As we sit here today, I want each of us sitting here today to think about the spiritual struggles that these children of God faced as we read and study their lives as they are recoded for us on the pages of God's Holy Scriptures. I also want you to see the daily struggles that they battled with as they walked on the face of this earth. I want you to see their imperfections and their sins as horrible as some of them might be. I also want you also to see that these people of God who struggled each and every day of their lives, are just like us living here in Watertown, WI in the year 2013. The struggles that Abraham, David and Moses faced are the same struggles that you and I face. The guilt that they faced as they fell short of God's perfection is the same guilt that you and I face, and the answer to the times that they and we have fell face down as we have lost these struggles is the same. The answer and the strength that we need is found in Jesus our Lord and Savior.

So this morning, let us join with the Apostle Paul as he very personally and very vividly lays out his personal struggle against the sin living in him from birth and the new person that also lives in him by the power of the Holy Spirit. I hope that each of us this morning will leave this place of worship humbled and yet refreshed as we meditate on the theme:

### **Sermon Theme: Life Is A Struggle!**

- 1. The struggle is against our sinful nature**
- 2. The victory comes through Jesus**

It should be mentioned that the text before us is sometimes debated by Bible scholars. Some believe that these types of statements could not be made by a Christian and assume that Paul is speaking about his days before he was a Christian. However, it seems far more likely that the key to understanding these words is tied in with what we refer to as the “dual nature” of a Christian; how each of us, in the words of Martin Luther, is both a “saint” and a “sinner” at the same time. With that as a general background, let’s turn to our text, where Paul begins with this tongue-twisting confession: **“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.”**

Do you understand what Paul is trying to say? There is a battle or struggle going on inside of each one of our hearts, and souls and minds. This struggle is very real and very powerful. To get a better grasp of this, we need to find out what this battle is and who is in this battle. Paul says, **“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.”** When we were born into this world, we inherited many things from our parents. Yes, we inherited human qualities such as our looks with certain facial features or certain personality traits. We inherited some intellect and genes that make us who we are. But we also inherited the sin which they inherited from their parents which can be traced all the way back to Adam and Eve. This we call the Sinful Nature. The sinful nature is in the hearts of every person from the time of conception. We can’t run away from or hide from it. It doesn’t skip a generation or two. It is always very strong. It is 100% against the will of God.

On the other side of the battle is the new person that came into our hearts when faith was created by the Holy Spirit, which for most of us was when we are baptized. The new person is the exact opposite of the Sinful nature. It is 100% seeking to do God’s Will. You can see the battle lines that are being drawn. **“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. . . . 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.”**

Back in College once a year we would have a tug a war contest between the different classes to see who was the strongest class. Each class was to pick the 10 strongest guys. The object was not all that complicated. You needed to pull the little red flag 10 feet to your side. The whistle blew and the fight was on. You would see each of the guys digging their feet in and pulling like crazy. Sometimes it was a complete and utter annihilation and the one team would just drag the losing team on the ground until the flag went the 10 feet. Other times it would be a long and drawn out battle. The one team would move the flag 2 feet and then back and forth sometimes for what seemed like forever until finally the flag moved the total 10 feet. Your arms would feel like jello and you could hardly move because you were so tired.

Our lives are like this picture of the tug of war. Each and every day we make decisions and there is this tug of war going on in our hearts. As children of God we know what God’s will is. We know that we are to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love our neighbors as ourselves, but then there is the pull of the enemy, our sinful nature, which tells us it is OK to sin. It is OK to hate as long as the person deserves it. Our sinful nature lies and deceives and sometimes we are pulled immediately into sin and we lose the battle – which is SIN. Other times the battle is more difficult. We go back and forth. And like Paul we wonder why we keep falling prey to the attacks of our sinful nature. We know what it is right and it is back and forth. What a struggle! And all too often the result is the same -- we sin. And like the apostle Paul, we say, **“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?”**

Some days that is what we as God’s children feel like. We are spiritually tired and worn out from this daily battle going on. And on top of this, many times we still have lost way too many the battles and have fallen into sin way too many times. We go to bed on Saturday night with every intention of getting up for

church in the morning, but we lose the battle and end up sleeping in or relaxing at home. We know that we should respect our classmates, our coworkers or anyone else, but when we see the other classmates, or coworkers making fun of someone we quickly jump and quickly forget what God has said. We know that God has said that we are supposed to give the first fruits of our offerings to God and even have budgeted this amount to say thanks to God, but then when it comes time to actually write out the check we lose faith and think that we couldn't possibly give God that much and still make our budget work. How many of us have had these types of struggles? ALL OF US! We have to yell out just as Paul did, "What a wretched person I am."

## 2. The victory comes through Jesus

While we are in this battle, we need to realize that we have failed miserably. We have lost the battles and there are too many to count, but Paul reminds us of the greatest truth in all of Scripture. While we have failed, Jesus hasn't. Do you grasp what Paul is trying to tell us? While we are wretched and sinful and deserve to die, God still loved us enough to send his Son, Jesus to win the battle for us. If we would go back to the tug of war picture that I talked about before, we talked about losing some of the time and how tired we were when the tug of wars were done. Let's change the playing field a little. In this tug of war we have sin on the one side and Jesus on the other side. This tug of war took place while Jesus was living his perfect life on this earth and culminated with his death on the cross of Calvary and his resurrection from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. Jesus lined up against the Devil as our Substitute. He pulled in our place and how many times did he win against the devil and sin – EVERY TIME. He won so thoroughly and lopsided that he crushed the head of Satan and kept God's laws perfectly in our place.

This is the fact that we need to remember each and every day that we as sinful human beings live in this world. The victory has been won. All the times we have failed to do the good that we knew we should have, God paid for that. Every time, we have done evil, when we knew that we were supposed to do good, Jesus paid for that. Every time that we have fallen short of being perfect as God has commanded of us, Jesus has paid for it with his blood. This victory over the devil and sin was so convincing that it tells us he crushed the head of Satan. He didn't just wound the devil or pay for part of our sin. He CRUSHED Satan and paid for every one of my sins.

Now how does this affect the way that we live our lives? Some people would find these words from Paul to be an excuse that we can't help but sins so why really try or maybe we use them as an excuse on why we do evil – kind of like the devil made me do it. But as children of God we need to realize that every day we live our lives to thank Jesus for the love he showed us. While it might be difficult to get our little sinful minds around this truth, we as God's children are a "saint" and a "sinner" at the same time. We are filled with sin, but by the faith that God has planted in our hearts we are saints because we have been led to trust that Jesus has paid for all my sins. This battle will continue to rage deep within our hearts and in the very depths of our minds, but I pray that we will continue to realize that while this life is a struggle, the battle is already won. We can turn to our Savior and humbly ask him for the forgiveness that our sin stricken hearts need. And Jesus will lead our hearts and minds to cry out in complete peace and comfort, "**Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!**"