

Sermon for The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: August 9, 2020

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Zechariah 9:9-12

Epistle Reading: Romans 7:14-25a

Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:25-30

Sermon Text: Romans 7:14-25a

Sermon Title: Christ, Our Deliverer (GGS Series)

Introit: Psalm 34:4-8; Antiphon: Psalm 34:1

Hymns:

LSB 791 – All People that on Earth do Dwell

LSB 717 – Eternal Father Strong to Save

LSB 783 – Take Me Life and Let it Be

LSB 794 – The Lord My god be Praised

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p.203



Songs:

Father Make Us One

A Shield About Me

Grace Alone

Holy is the Lord

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Romans 7:14–25a

We know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. 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 with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

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Grace to you, and peace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sometimes the smallest thing can tell a greater story. Your great grandmother's hope chest. Stone markers telling of Civil War battles. The smallest things can tell much greater stories, extending over time and involving many people.



Consider this silver cup. It was buried in the home of a once prosperous Roman family. When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, it was buried for centuries. This one small cup belonging to an unnamed family told of a much larger story. A story of gods and humans. The story of Rome and what it was like to live under the rule of Caesar Augustus.



On one side of the cup is the image of Augustus, surrounded by gods. He is seated, and being handed the world by Venus and winged Victory, while Mars, the god of war, brings before him a multitude of conquered nations. On the other side of the cup is the image of Augustus, ruling over his people. Here, the image is one of mercy and not of war. Augustus is seated, people are coming before him, and he extends one hand out to the people while in the other hand he holds a spear.

This image of the emperor was common throughout Rome at the time when Paul wrote his letter. It was carved into marble, printed on coins, and molded into ceremonial cups. It helped people understand what it meant to be faithful to Rome.

Faithfulness was the word used to describe the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered. The emperor held both power and mercy. In power, he would protect his people, so you see him with a spear in his hand, in mercy he would rule his people, and so you see him reaching out with an open hand. Power and mercy in this one figure, ruling over people, one small actor in the much larger story of the gods of Rome.

When Paul wrote the letter to the Romans he offered another story of another Conqueror who ruled over people in power and mercy. This God and man was Jesus Christ.

The small portion of the letter we are looking at today is well-known among Lutherans. It points to the struggle between sinner and saint. This struggle is real and dwells in the heart of every person. Some people confess this struggle openly, asking others to help them, other people hide this struggle, putting on the best show they can. All people, however, suffer this struggle. They will continue to do so until the day when our Conqueror Jesus Christ returns we will be involved in this struggle of being a sinner and a saint.

Paul's description is personal. It tells the story of one man and one struggle that never seems to end. Paul knows the good that God desires and Paul himself agrees with this desire. He acknowledges that what God wants is indeed good. Yet Paul also discovers that he is "sold under sin."¹ Paul uses the language of slavery and of captivity. His whole body "wages war" and he is "captive" to the law of sin.² Paul knows the good that he wants to do, but he is unable to do it. Instead, he finds that what he doesn't want to do, he does. A slave to sin, a captive to his flesh, Paul cries out for deliverance.

His story, however, is not the story of only one man. This is the story that touches all people. Paul's cry is that of Cain, knowing the good that God wants him to do and yet also knowing the evil that is close at hand. Paul's one small story is the larger story and experience that we all know so well.

This, however, is not the only story that Paul wants to tell. In fact, there is a much greater story, the story of God that Paul wants to highlight for all people of God's faithfulness and His promises to His people.

As early as the fall in the Garden of Eden, God had begun telling this story of His love. As Adam and Eve stood there exposed and ashamed God began to speak of His love. They overheard it, in a conversation he had with Satan. God said to the serpent:

1 Romans 7:14

2 Romans 7:23

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
between your decedents and her Decedent; He shall
bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.³

Here was the first glimpse of God's promise. The greater story of God. He would send One, an Offspring of the woman, who would bruise the head of Satan and conquer in the fight. Adam and Eve lived in hope.

The individuals, the families, the nations that followed them lived in hope in God's greater story. The apostle Paul writes this letter to the Romans to proclaim that it did come true in Jesus Christ. "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Paul cries out. "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"⁴

In this section of the letter, Paul lets his one small story become part of a much larger story. The story of Jesus our Lord. He is the one who came as our Deliverer. We delivered Him to death as Satan worked through us to bruise His heel and yet He delivered us from death and from the kingdom of Satan as He revealed His power in His resurrection, and called us into the kingdom of God.

God loves us, dies for us, and rises to gives us new life. Paul proclaims "Jesus Christ is Lord" and with those words he invites everyone into God's greater story. Jesus is the One who rules, the One who is greater than Caesar and Caesar's gods. He himself is the one true God, and He is at the heart of God's greater story of the rescue of His people from slavery.

An artist once captured this rule of Jesus in a painting. The painting is called, "Christ and the Four Evangelists." It depicts Jesus as the Savior of the World. In 1516, Fra Bartolommeo was asked to paint this piece for a chapel.⁵ In it, Christ stands on top of the chalice, both God and man, ruling over the world. His one arm holds a scepter with the globe at the top. He truly holds all power and rules over all creation. His other hand, however, is raised in blessing.



³ Genesis 3:15

⁴ Romans 7:24-25

⁵ Salvadore Billi, a Florentine merchant, asked Fra Bartolommeo to paint this piece and then placed it in the chapel of SS. Annunziata de' Servi. It was later purchased by Medici (1618) for his private chapel.

Through His death and resurrection, He has accomplished salvation for all people and now rules over all things in love and offers His blessing to the world.

For some, this image has lost the intimacy of the silver cup of Augustus. There Augustus was seated among the people, extending his hand in mercy to them. Here, Christ is above the people, even the evangelists appear small when compared with His higher and larger presence, and His hand is raised in blessing not extended to one individual person in mercy, but if you look closely at the image, you can see how Christ has chosen to rule through His people.

The men who surround him are the evangelists who have written His message that is now still being read to the world. They each hold their books, their Gospels. The men in the back are looking at Jesus, while the ones in the front are engaging with the world. Matthew looks up at Jesus and Mark points his finger toward Jesus while conversing with John. Luke stares out over the people who are gathered and John points his finger downward. There we see two angels holding a disk. In that disk is just one place in the much larger world.

When this picture was placed in the altar of a chapel, an amazing thing would happen. The priest, facing the altar, would lead the worshiping community in communion. At this celebration of the Lord's Supper the priest consecrated the host, he would raise the host above his head and there it would appear in that one small window on the world upheld by angels. That body of Christ is the place where God's people meet Jesus. Yes, he has ascended into heaven. His left hand holds His scepter. He has all power and He rules over the world. His right hand is raised in blessing over all. Yet this same Jesus is found among His people today. He is present with us, intimate and near, as He comes in His body and His blood, the chalice and the host, to be your deliverer from sin. Here is your Savior.

The evangelists proclaim this message. They want us to hear it and to have eyes to see this much larger story. Today we listened to the words of Matthew in our Gospel reading. There Jesus invites you to see and to come to Him.

At that time, Jesus declared, 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and the understanding and revealed

them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.⁶

Here, in a very tangible way, Jesus brings you once again to the heart of God's greater story. As we gather for the Lord's Supper, we are connected to the much larger story of God's loving rule over His world. This is the story of Jesus, our Deliverer who has now come among us. The one who rules the world has lifted His hand in eternal blessing and we now come and receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.

Yes, we come with our smaller private stories, the moments when the good that we wanted to do, we did not do and the evil that we didn't want to do we did. That struggle is there and it is real and we come today confessing our sin. We also come trusting in our deliverance.

Jesus is faithful. He remains faithful to his promises.

Take eat, this is my body.
Take drink, this is my blood.
Given for you.
For the full forgiveness of all your sins."

At the Lord's Supper we are joined to God's greater story. The story of God saving the world through Jesus. As we lift the cup of salvation to the Lord, His power, His blessing, His mercy extend to us and He continues to rule until the end of the world and through all eternity. Amen.



What actually happens.



What you see.



Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people