

God's Greater Story – Christ our Deliverer

5th Sun. after Pent. – 07/05/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 7:14-25a Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 24-25a, [Paul says,] **“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Introduction:

- ✘ Yesterday we Americans celebrated Independence Day; the day we declared our independence from the oppression and bondage of Great Britain 244 years ago. We mark that day with small acts of patriotism – putting out the American flag, watching fireworks and taking a day off from work.
 - ➔ These are small things that help us remember the far greater story of our nation's revolt from a world power and the establishment of a new country.
- ✘ This often happens, when small things tell a far greater story. Think for example of your own great grandmother's hope chest recounting her life; of stone markers that tell of Civil War battles; small things telling stories that extend over time and involve many people.
- ✘ One such item is a well-used silver cup, about the size of a chalice. It was buried in the homestead of a prosperous Roman family in the first century AD.
 - ➔ When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, this cup was valuable enough to be buried in a wine cellar but not valuable enough for the family to take it with them as they fled for safety.
 - ➔ This small cup, belonging to an unnamed family, told a much larger story; a story of both gods and humans. It told the story of early Rome and what it was like to live under Caesar Augustus.
- ✘ One side of the cup bears the image of Augustus, surrounded by the Roman gods. As he sits on his throne, the god Venus and winged Victory hand him the world while Mars, the god of war, brings before him a multitude of conquered nations.
 - ➔ On the other side of the cup Augustus is portrayed, ruling over people. This is the image, not of war but of mercy. As Augustus sits on his throne, people are coming before him, and he extends one hand out to the people while his other hand holds a spear.
 - ➔ This image was a common image of the Roman emperor at the time when St. Paul wrote his letter that we consider in our current sermon series. The image was carved into marble friezes; printed on coins and molded into ceremonial cups like the one that the family buried in their wine cellar for safe keeping.
 - ➔ It helped people understand their relationship with their emperor; their conqueror; that he held both power and mercy. In power, he would protect his people, shown by the spear in his hand. And in mercy, he ruled the people, shown as he reaches out with an open hand.
- ✘ When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he offered them another story of another conqueror; one who truly ruled over people in both power and mercy. This conqueror; this deliverer; this God and man was Jesus, the Christ.

I. The Conquered

- ✘ The Epistle Reading we have before us today, is a small portion of Paul's letter that tells us of a far greater story; a story of which we all are intimately involved each and every day as Christians.

- Paul opens himself up to the core of his very being and describes the real struggle that is hidden inside the heart of everyone us. It's the struggle within our Christian nature as both sinner and saint.
- Some of us confess this struggle openly; asking others to help us in developing relationships of mutual accountability to God. Other people go to great lengths to hide this struggle; putting on the best face we can while our insides twist and turn with self-conflict.
- But all people suffer with this same struggle. And it's not something, like that cup that can just be buried and left behind. No, until the day when our Conqueror, Jesus, returns, we all will be involved in this struggle; being at the same time 100% sinner, that is subject Satan's flaming darts of temptation and desire and 100% saint, that is redeemed and restored by Jesus in the forgiving waters of our baptism.
- ⊗ In Paul's personal description he tells his own internal story of a struggle that never seems to end.
 - Like you and me, Paul says that he knows from Scripture the good that God desires of him. And in faith, he agrees with God's desire. He acknowledges that what God wants is indeed good in every way.
 - Yet, as Paul says in verse 14, he knows that he is "of the flesh, sold under sin". Paul uses the language of slavery and captivity. The members of his body he says, "wage war" against his desire to do good and he is "captive" to the law of sin (v. 23).
 - It really is an internal, back and forth war; a battle where Paul wants to do good, but too often finds that he is unable to do it. Instead he finds that the exact opposite takes place; that which he doesn't want to do is what he actually ends up doing.
 - So, now as a slave to sin; as a captive to his flesh, Paul cries out for deliverance.
- ⊗ And of course, Paul's not alone, is he? No, his is the story of all people. Paul's cry is the same cry of Cain in his anger toward his brother Abel and toward God; knowing both the good that God wanted him to do and also the evil that tugged at his soul.
 - It's the cry of Joseph's brothers; knowing the care and concern they should show their brother, yet also knowing the evil that led them to sell Joseph into slavery. David who is said to be a man "after [God's] own heart" in 1 Samuel 13:14 also knew the evil pleasure of adultery and the treachery of murder.
- ⊗ From individuals to families to nations, this "captivity to the law of sin" (v.23) continues even through the ministry of Jesus where we see Peter's struggle of knowing the good that he wanted to do in following Jesus to death, yet falling to the evil of denying his own Lord in the High Priest's courtyard.
 - And this one small story of personal, private, and inner turmoil is ultimately the larger story; the all-encompassing experience that we all know so well in our lives today as well. Paul's harsh words in verse 18, are words that all of us struggle with over and again, "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."

II. The Conqueror

- ⊗ 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 us and all people. This is a story of God's faithfulness; not our faithfulness to God but God's faithfulness to keep the promises He has made to His people.

- ✘ This story of God’s love began as early as Adam and Eve’s fall in the Garden of Eden.
 - ➔ Ashamed and exposed in their nakedness Adam and Eve heard God begin to tell His story when He spoke to the snake. In Genesis 3:15 God said to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel”.
 - ➔ Here is the first glimpse of God’s promise; His greater story. He would send an offspring of a woman, who would bruise (or crush) the head of Satan and conquer him in the fight for human souls. Adam and Eve and all generations since lived in hope that God’s story would indeed come true.
- ✘ And Paul tells us here in His letter to the Christians in Rome that it did come true in the person of Jesus Christ. “Who will deliver me from this body of death?” Paul cries out. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (vv.23-24)
 - ➔ In this one small section; this one short phrase Paul points us to the far greater story of Jesus Christ, our Lord. He is the one who came into our sin-soaked struggle; into this world held captive to the law to be our Deliverer. Yes, we delivered Him up to death as Satan worked through us to bruise His heel; that is to do injury to His earthly flesh. But He worked in that earthly affair to deliver you and me from the permanent consequences of sin and Satan.
 - ➔ Jesus revealed His power in His resurrection and He called us out of this world into the eternal kingdom of God. It’s a story like no other; a story where God loves us as we are; dies for us, and rises from death to give us new life.
- ✘ In verse 25 Paul proclaims, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord”. With those words Paul invites us all; invites everyone into God’s greater story.
 - ➔ As “Lord” Jesus is the one who rules; the one who is greater than Caesar and all of Caesar’s so-called gods. He alone is God. He has come as our Deliverer. And He is both the main character and the driving force in God’s greater story of rescue; the rescue of His people from slavery; the story of God redeeming all people from their war with sin.

III. The Cup of Faithfulness

- ✘ An artist once sought to capture this rule of Jesus in a painting. It’s the painting called, “Christ and the Four Evangelists” by Fra Bartolommeo in 1516.
 - ➔ We’ve placed this painting inside the front of today’s bulletin (or at the beginning of the home worship materials if you’re listening to this online). The painting depicts Jesus as *Salvator Mundi*, that is *The Savior of the World*. Bartolommeo was asked to paint this piece to be placed inside a chapel.
 - ➔ If you look closely you see that Christ stands on top of the chalice, meaning that all of which Christ represents in this painting is received in the cup of Holy Communion. In one arm He holds a scepter with the globe at the top, showing that He holds all power and rules over all creation. His other hand is raised as He offers His blessing to all people because He has accomplished salvation for all people of all time.
- ✘ As Deliverer, Jesus stands above all people, even the evangelists who appear small when compared with His glory. Yet Jesus raises His hand in protection and blessing.
 - ➔ Jesus shows that He has chosen to rule through His people, beginning with the message recorded and communicated to us through the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; each one holding the book in which he has written about Jesus.

- ⊗ This same Jesus who rules over the entire world; who blesses us as only He can do is present among us here today. He is intimate and near as He comes to us in His Word; as He feeds us with His body and His blood in the bread and the wine to be our Deliverer from sin; our Savior right now today.
- ⊗ The evangelists proclaim this message, don't they? They want us to hear it; to have eyes to see Christ's much larger story. Listen, for example today to the words of Matthew in our Gospel Reading. Jesus invites you and me there to see and to come to Him.
 - ➔ "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' (Matt. 11:28).
- ⊗ In a very tangible way, Jesus brings you and me once again to the heart of this greater story of God. When we gather for the Lord's Supper, we are connected to the story of God's loving rule over His world.
 - ➔ There we are infused into the story of Jesus, our Deliverer who has taken on human flesh to come into our midst. Yes, the one who rules the world has lifted His hand in eternal blessing to you as you receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.
 - ➔ As you come to receive His grace you bring and you empty your bag of struggles; your difficulties in the war against sin. You bring the moments when the good that you wanted to do, you did not do; when the evil that you didn't want to do you did. You confessed that sin; that struggle as we began worship today and now you trust wholly in your deliverance. Why? because Jesus is faithful. Jesus keeps His promise, "Take eat. Take drink. This is My body. This is My blood. Given for you; for the forgiveness of sin".

Conclusion

- ⊗ Yes, take heart dear Christians for our Lord rules. As your Deliverer, you know that in His hand is power and blessing; in His sacrament, you have mercy placed upon your hand and poured into the cup as His body and blood which is given and shed for you.
 - ➔ Here in Jesus you are joined to this much larger story; the story of God saving you and all the world as our Deliverer. Amen.