

I DO NOT DO WHAT I WANT TO DO
Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost, 2020
Romans 7:14-25a

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Second Reading from before, Romans 7:14-25a: **For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I have sinful human nature, and am sold under sin.** ¹⁵ **For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do, but I do what I hate.** ¹⁶ **If I do what I do not want to do, I also agree that the Law is good.** ¹⁷ **However, now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me.** ¹⁸ **For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful human nature. For the willingness is present with me, but doing what is good is not.** ¹⁹ **For I do not do the good that I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do.** ²⁰ **If I am doing what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but the sin that is living in me.** ²¹ **Therefore I find this to be the rule: Although I want to do what is good, evil is present with me.** ²² **For according to the inward human being I delight in God's Law,** ²³ **but in the members of my body I see another law, which is waging war against the Law of my mind, and making me a prisoner to the Law of sin that is in the members of my body.** ²⁴ **What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body, which is bringing death?** ²⁵ **Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Every so often, the topic of free will comes up in discussions among Christians. Does man have a free will? The answer is “yes, and no.”

What do we mean by this answer? Well, a person's will has some freedom to choose *civil righteousness* and to do things subject to reason. In other words, he is able to perform acts of civil righteousness which may be called good. For example, such good things would be the *willingness to work, to eat and drink, to have a friend, to clothe oneself, to build a house, to marry, to raise cattle, to learn various arts, or whatsoever good applies to this life.*¹ Simply put, in earthly matters we can make a choice, a decision on what we are going to do, to our own good.

However, when it comes to *spiritual matters*, ever since the Fall, when sin enslaved his mind, man does not have a free will. ***Man cannot please God by his own actions.*** The prophet Isaiah writes, “*All our righteous actions are like a filthy garment*” (64:6). The Hebrew used here for *filthy garment* refers to cloth used for a woman's menstrual period, a time of uncleanness, according to Leviticus chapter 15.² While the Levitical laws described many things, such as certain animals, as “filthy or unclean,” Isaiah confessed that the people themselves were “filthy” and placed himself among the polluted and defiled and emphasised the disgusting and revolting character of sin. The righteous acts of any human are nothing but filthy garments.

How, then, can we be saved when we are “filthy” in God's eyes? Why should God deliver us when even our best - “*all our righteous actions*” - are nothing more than dirty, filthy garments? Isaiah's words, as harsh as they may be, convey the true nature of human sinfulness. Why indeed should the Holy One of Israel save anyone? And when you think about it, quite often, our actions are out of sync with how we ought to behave. Let's look at some examples.

Think about how we speak. How many times do words come out before we even think about them? How many know that they shouldn't talk back to their parents, but they do. Married couples: You know you should not respond to your spouse with that sarcastic remark or that tone of voice, but you do. It has been said that “patience is a virtue.” Still, how many of us truly have the ability to wait for something without frustration. At certain times we have to be patient, yet often we lose all patience and blow our top. We get so frustrated and can't help ourselves. Think of all the rubbish on television. We know that we should not watch certain things because we know it will fill up our minds with absolute nonsense. Yet we still do it.

¹ Article XVIII of the Augsburg Confession. The AC quotes from Augustine's *Hypogosticon*, Book III

² Leviticus 15:19-33

What about more important things - things like reading the Bible. We know that we should find the time every single day to read and study God's Word – if you do, then you are to be commended, but every single day? Sometimes it becomes a chore. Parents, you know you should read Bible stories and teach the Small Catechism to your children daily. The devil and the world are just waiting to pick them up if you don't. But despite all your best intentions, you just don't get around to it. I am sure we all have non-Christian friends, and sometimes the door is wide open for them to hear the Gospel from us. The opportunity has presented itself, but we keep our mouths shut. Do we have to go on!

The whole point is that every single day, just like Paul, we are tempted in thought, word, and deed, and every single day, just like Paul, we give in to sin and have to admit, **“For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do, but I do what I hate.”** His words are a bit of a tongue twister, but they are correct.

We love the Lord and all He has done for us, yet we still sin. Even though we have been washed clean and given eternal life when we were baptised, yet we are still beset by the old sinful nature, the Old Adam. Why? The answer is that we are saints and sinners at the same time. Even though we have become children of God, yet the old and the new self remain active in our earthly lives. Paul lamented to the Church at Galatia, *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”* (5:16-17). Paul knew that even though he was a child of God, and knew what he ought to do, yet he still kept on sinning day after day after day. In fact, so tenacious is the Old Adam's hold that Paul described himself as being **“sold under sin.”** This does not mean that Paul was under the control of sin – sin's dominion had indeed been broken by Christ's death – but time and time again Paul's sinful nature spoils even his best intentions.

So how can our continuing sin be explained when we know that God forbids it? Paul gives the answer. He says, **“However, now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me.”** Here we have an accurate assessment of the situation. We have noted that we, as Christians, retain the old sinful nature throughout this earthly life. That old sinful nature lives alongside our new and real self. This new self is totally in sync with God's will. It wants to do the things God wants done. So it was also in Paul's case. His new self, his “inner being”³ delighted in God's Law. **“For according to the inward human being I delight in God's Law,”** he says. Hence the problem does not lie with our new self or with God's Law. No, the villain is sin, which operates through the old sinful nature, still clinging to us. So we need to remember this then. It is not the new man in us who is sinning, but that old human nature, that old Adam. It is the old sinful self, who carries out the will of the devil.

It's a terrible frustration, one that makes us totally miserable and to want to cry out with Paul, **“what a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body, which is bringing death?”** The result of our sin is death, so Paul asks “Who will solve this problem I have? I am a wretched person, completely incapable of attaining to eternal life. What must I do?”

The solution to Paul's problem was this: **“Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** Paul knew that he himself could not provide the answer. That is why he looked to Christ. We too, must not look to ourselves as if we can find the solution. No, we must look to Christ! Our salvation, the complete forgiveness of all our sins, has been earned by Christ's perfect sacrifice. The only one who could do what God required, who could fulfil the Law perfectly, was Christ Himself, who was *“born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as sons”* (Galatians 4:4-5). Only Christ had that perfect will to do what the Father wanted, and through baptism, we have been joined to His righteousness. We have been joined to Him. When God looks at us, all He sees is the perfect righteousness of His only Son, Jesus Christ.

Yes, Jesus knows the struggles we all have. In fact, that is why we heard Him say earlier in our Gospel reading, *“Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I shall give you rest! ²⁹ Take My yoke on 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.”* A yoke was a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two animals. Jewish rabbis spoke of the “yoke of the Law” as glorious obedience to God, which freed one from obligations to the world

³ Romans 7:22

and gave rest. Jesus described this yoke as heavy⁴ and offered His alternative: to be yoked with Him to the Gospel. Jesus has carried our sufferings and sorrows.⁵ He was not wounded for His transgressions or crushed for His iniquities but for ours. If one is yoked to Jesus, he will find rest. Jesus has carried all our sins and sorrows to the cross. His presence and forgiveness lighten every load.

No doubt, life is a struggle, and often full of us doing all kinds of foolish and sinful deeds. We all have the desire to do what is right but end up doing what we don't want to do: those things we hate. Yet with Paul, we can still cry out **“Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”** That was his shout of triumph. That is our shout too. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, eternal Lord and Creator of all things, You are our light and our salvation; You are all we ever need. We, Your children, come before You in prayer, and ask You to place Your hands on us in blessing.

Bless us with sincere faith in Your Son Jesus Christ. Grant that we may believe in Him with all our hearts, trust in Him alone for salvation, and have the assurance of everlasting life through Him. Renew us through our baptism day by day, as we live in hope and wait for our complete salvation in the new creation.

Keep us in Your fatherly care in this world, which has been ruined by sin. Guard us in all times of danger, and protect us in every peril. Keep us safe, by Your grace, that we may never lose our faith because of our sins and frailty. Grant that we may keep growing in faith and spiritual understanding. When death approaches, make us strong by Your sure promises, and finally give us the joy of Your eternal presence, complete redemption of our bodies, and resurrection to life eternal.

Fill Your Church with Your grace and power, O Lord, so that the light of Your truth may shine throughout the world. May all people know Your will and rejoice in Your salvation. Equip our pastors to be Christlike in mercy and love, and true leaders of Your people. Give us true joy as we serve You and one another, living in newness of life.

Hold Your hand of blessing over our land. Preserve us from war, earthquake, destructive storms, famine, disease, violence, tyranny, persecution, treachery, and rebellion. Guide those in government, business, education, and entertainment, so that they may live in the knowledge that You are Lord, and no other god may share Your glory.

Be gracious to all our homes and families. Enable children to grow in body, mind, and spirit, enjoying favour with God and man. By Your Spirit equip all parents with Christian faith and insight, and the constant desire to obey Your will.

Be merciful on all who suffer sickness, sorrow, the weakness of age, the weariness of hard work, separation from loved ones, uncertainty about the future, broken relationships, or any other burden. Give them Your rich peace. Show Yourself to be a God always ready to help, and give faith, trust, courage, and hope to all in need.

We pray for these things to You, heavenly Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, who, together with You and the Holy Spirit, is the one God, to be praised for ever and ever. Amen.

⁴ Matthew 23:4

⁵ Isaiah 53:4

5th Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 9)

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, daughter of Jerusalem! Look! Your King is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and is riding on a donkey, yes, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ “I shall cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of battle will be eliminated.”

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ “As for you also, because of the blood of your Covenant, I shall release your prisoners from the waterless cistern.”

¹² “Return to your fortress, prisoners who have hope! Even today I declare that I shall restore twice as much to you.

Romans 7:14-25a

¹⁴ For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I have sinful human nature and am sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand what I am doing. For I do not do what I want to do but do what I hate. ¹⁶ If I do what I do not want to do, I also agree that the Law is good. ¹⁷ However, now it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is the sin that is living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful human nature. For the willingness is present with me but doing what is good is not. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good that I want to do. Instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do. ²⁰ If I am doing what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but the sin that is living in me. ²¹ Therefore, I find this to be the rule: Although I want to do what is good, evil is present with me. ²² For according to the inward human being I delight in God’s Law, ²³ but in the members of my body I see another law, which is waging war against the Law of my mind and making me a prisoner to the law of sin that is in the members of my body. ²⁴ What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body, which is bringing death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Matthew 11:25-30

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from wise and intelligent people and have revealed them to infants. ²⁶ Yes, Father, I praise You that this is how You have graciously wanted it to be. ²⁷ All things

have been committed to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and the one to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.

²⁸ “Come to Me, all you who are working hard and carrying a heavy burden, and I shall give you rest! ²⁹ Take My yoke on 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.”

