

Sermon for July 6th, 2014

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

On this weekend when we celebrate the **blessing** of the freedoms that we have in our country and what it **means** to be Americans we heard in our second reading for this morning that the apostle Paul was **lamenting** over the fact that he was **not** free from sin and the **torment** that it brings. He was conflicted by not **only** by the fact that he could not understand his own actions and that he was **doing** what he did not want to do—in fact he was **doing** the very things he hated. He **wanted** to do good, to **delight** in the law of God but there was a **war** going on inside of him that made him captive to sin. He **even** called himself a 'wretched man'. He said his **mind** was a slave to the law of God but his **flesh** was a slave to the law of sin. Such is the human condition ever since the time of **Adam and Eve**.

This is a pretty heavy topic when we were **celebrating** and having fun just a couple of days ago. But, even though Paul wrote this letter to the Romans more than **1,950** years ago I think he pretty much hit the nail on the head when it came to writing about what it means to live in this world of ours.

As Christians we 'know' in our heads how we should live as disciples of Jesus, but it is not always that easy—*is it?* **How** about when someone cuts you off

in traffic? Or **how** about when a loved one does something that makes you angry and you respond with words you may **regret** having said later? But **many** times—as Paul said—I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do. It is **not easy** to live the Christian way of life with all that affects us in this world. No matter **what** generation we are in or no matter **what** time period we are living in.

As a matter of the fact, in 1525 Martin Luther wrote a treatise called, “***The Bondage of the Will.***” In response to Paul’s letter to the Romans Luther writes, (quote) “*What comes through the law is **not** righteousness but a knowledge of sin. It is the task, the function, and the effect of the law to be a **light** to the ignorant and blind, but such a light **reveals** sin, evil, death, and hell. (Our human condition.) It affords **no** help and brings **no** deliverance from these. When one becomes aware of the **disease** of sin, they are troubled, distressed, even in despair. (Much as Paul was in our reading for today.) The law is **no** help. When sins are unrecognized, there is **no** room for a remedy and **no** hope of a cure, because one will **not** submit to the touch of a healer when they imagine themselves well and in **no** need of a physician. There is need of another light to reveal the remedy. This is the **voice** of the gospel, revealing Christ as the **deliverer** from **all** these things.” (end quote).*

Even in his despair Paul knew **who** provided the answer to his question of, “*Who will rescue me from this body of death?*” As his reply to his **own** question

was, “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!*” So **there** we have it—the **answer** to our question in times of desperation, the **answer** to our question in times of conflict and suffering, and the **answer** to our question when we need someone or somewhere to turn.

In our gospel reading we **hear** the invitation given by Jesus to come to Him when times are **rough** and we feel as though we have **no other place** to go. When sin is **weighing us down**, when burdens are **too much to bear**, and when we are in need of comfort- the type of comfort which this world does not provide-Jesus says **to us**, “*Come to me, all **you** that are wearry and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you—together we can carry this burden—learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

What a dramatic difference in those words of **comfort and compassion** which Jesus spoke in comparison to what **Paul** was dealing with as he was tormented with his own sinful self. A few more words from Martin Luther, (quote) “***True** faith in Jesus is a treasure beyond compare which brings with it **salvation** and it **saves us** from every evil. These words of Jesus are peace filled and full of goodness for those who **believe** in Him. A person who **clings** to Him with a **firm** faith will be so closely united with Him that they will share in the power of these words.” (End quote.)*

I would like to conclude with a story. Joseph M. Scriven was born in Ireland in 1819. When he was 25 years old he was to be married. The **day before** his wedding his fiancé died in a tragic drowning accident. Heartbroken, Joseph sailed from his homeland to start a new life in Canada as a teacher. While in Canada he fell in love again and was engaged to a woman named **Eliza**. Once again, Joseph's hopes and dreams were shattered when Eliza became **ill and died** before their wedding could take place. We can **only imagine** the sadness, suffering, and pain this young man went through but history tells us that his **faith** in God sustained him. Soon after Eliza's death Joseph joined the **Plymouth Brethren** and began preaching for a **Baptist** church. Joseph never married, but spent the remainder of his life giving **all** his time, money, and even the clothes off his back to help the less fortunate. He spread the love and compassion of Jesus wherever he went.

Now, around the same time that Eliza died in Canada, Joseph received word from Ireland that his mother was ill. He could not go to be with her, so he **wrote** her a **letter** of comfort and enclosed one of his **poems** entitled, "*What a Friend We Have in Jesus.*" As we **sing** this song next as our hymn of the day, may you pay attention to the words of this hymn and remember the story of this man who went through **so much** in his own life—a man who seemingly took Jesus' yoke upon himself so that **he** would have comfort for his **own soul** as he worked to give comfort to the lives of others along the way. **All thanks be to God. AMEN.**