

Written Copy: Romans 7:22-25a "War Has Been Declared"

6th Sunday @ Pentecost: Proper 9

Sunday, July 9th, 2023

Text: Romans 7:22-25a

²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ 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. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Exegetical Statement

Here Paul switches from his normal pronoun of proclamation, preaching to "you" the Church in Rome, making application to him personally. And these verbs are not past tense, they are present tense. This is what he is dealing with right now in his faith walk. He knows the law is good, it is from God informing us how we are to live as His baptized children. He knows what the law tells him to do, and furthermore desires to follow it perfectly, because that is what is good in God's eyes and would be the best for him and for others. Yet, when he looks at what his mind, mouth, and hands do, it is not in keeping with the law, but it pleases the sinful nature that still exists inside him. This sinful nature continues to make it's home inside of him even as the redeemed heart and mind given by Christ in baptism lives there as well. He desires to follow that new heart's desire to obey the law and will of God. But he still finds himself doing what is evil, what his new heart and mind desire. No matter how hard he tries to fight and conquer the sinful self, it wages war against his redeemed self, taking him captive to practice sinful disobedience. As he tries to fight this war himself, he has become a miserable and beaten down man. Who can save him from the death he is earning for himself. Thanks be to God! Jesus Christ our Lord remains our Savior.

Focus Statement:

The life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has changed everything. He rode into Jerusalem to become to give us victory over sin, death, and eternal hell. And He has accomplished that completely. He has the answer to every time we allow the sinful self to rule our thoughts/words/actions: I have won. That sin and every sin is forgiven. See it as sin, repent of it, and turn it over to me. In your baptism rise daily, moment by moment, and live according to the redeemed self I renew in you through the Absolution. Look forward in hope to the Last Day when your sinful self will be gone-removed forever.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We don't want to admit it, but Paul's struggle is ours too. We look at our fellow Christians and they can seem to have their act together and sin under control. And the devil wants us to believe that we are the only ones who struggle with sin, especially those repetitive sinful failings that we just can't seem to overcome. We feel wretched along with Paul.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to see sin as a big deal. But see Jesus as an even bigger deal. He is the answer and victor in this war against the sinful self. Understand your fellow Christians are fighting too and lift them up in prayer and encouragement.

Subject Sentence: We fight, yet Christ has won the decisive battle.

Introduction

War has been declared. And when it comes to a battle or a war, what do you want to see? You and I want to see a decisive and final victory. World War II ended in a decisive and final victory as both the Germans and the Japanese were forced to surrender. And furthermore, have never raised their hands against us as enemies again.

What we don't like is when there is no decisive victory, such as in Vietnam or Afghanistan, where we pulled out and left the people in that country we were trying to help hanging. This is not to fault the brave soldiers who fought. In both instances it was a war that for various reasons we could not win, especially when the cost of lives lost were considered to be too high when compared to the objective we were trying to achieve, as well as the lack of support at home for continued fighting when no sure victory is in sight. It's the same problem and the frustration with the war in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army has won some surprising battles, but the Russian forces, although somewhat demoralized, have not given up yet. We want to see them driven out of the country. We want to see the Ukrainians celebrate a decisive victory. But when and if that will happen is still a mystery.

Thankfully the United States at the moment has not declared war against any other nation. Our country is at peace from without. But the same can't be said for you and I as Christians. War has been declared. And Paul, in this section of his letter to the Romans, describes the battle that has been going on ever since Adam and Eve fell from grace. It's your battle and my battle too.

My Sinful Nature vs. Redeemed Nature

War has been declared. Paul describes it as the battle of our Sinful Nature vs, our Redeemed nature. We want this battle to be over. We want a final and decisive victory. And in one sense it seems like it should be over and done with. Our Old Testament Lesson recalls the Palm Sunday truth of Christ riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as the King of Kings who came to fight for us. He did not come to fight the Romans. In fact, He came to fight for the Romans, and the Jews, and the rest of the Gentile nations including you and me. He is God the Son who joined Himself with humanity to come and win a decisive victory over three enemies that no other human being could defeat. By giving up His life on the cross as the only innocent and sinless human being ever to live, He became our atoning sacrifice for sin. He took our sin, our punishment, and our guilt to the cross and to the tomb, and they were buried with Him, never to rise again. With no sinful charges to accuse us of, the devil lost his hold over us. Christ redeemed us from the devil's kingdom and placed us in His own kingdom of grace. He took from us the punishment we deserved that is eternal death and instead gave to us what He won for us, eternal life.

We confess that through our baptism we are so united with Him that His victory over sin has become our victory. Except, when I look at how I live my life, victory over sin is not exactly what I see. I would wager to say that when you take an honest look at your life you see the same thing. We see ourselves giving in to sin far too often. And we look around at our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they seem like they're fine. They seem like they've got it all together. We don't often see them losing their temper. We don't see them being impatient. We don't see them struggling with impure thoughts, words, and actions. And of course, the devil is always there to whisper in our ear and point out badly we are losing the war against sin. He loves to say, "Look at you! You did that thing again! You had that thought again! You said those words again! You got angry and impatient again! You been gossiping again! You call yourself a Christian and you do those things? How can you think that you are winning? Maybe that victory Christ won isn't yours after all."

When we honestly look at our lives it can get pretty brutal. And the devil's accusations can make us question how our Lord feels about us. Perhaps you've been there a time or two. But you didn't want to say anything to anyone because you are afraid that you're the only one experiencing this. I'm here to tell you that you are not. I have been there too. And not just me. Super Apostle Paul, who carried the Gospel across the Roman Empire, planting Churches, suffering beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, and jail; he knows exactly how you feel.

Paul describes what is going on inside him as a war. It is the war involving the Sinful Nature, that part of him that loves to please itself instead of loving and obeying God and loving others. It wants what it wants. And sometimes it takes control and runs his life. It battles against another part of him, the Redeemed Nature that was created and planted in him in his baptism. It is that part of him that confesses faith in Jesus Christ, knows the love that Jesus has for Him that moved Him to sacrifice His to take away all his sins. It is the part of him that believes Jesus has the most amazing kind of love for him. It knows and holds fast to the victory that is His resurrection. And it wants more than anything to live out that victory in all that he says and does. But instead, he still finds himself doing the opposite.

War has been declared, not just in Paul's life but in your life and my life as well. His battle is the battle you and I fight every single day. **Romans 7:19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.** We know what God wants us to do, and we know how He wants us to live. We know we're supposed to put Him first and others second. We know we're supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves. We know we're not supposed to give in to impure thoughts, words, and actions. We know these things. We hate when we do these things. And yet, we still do them. What is especially hard are those sins we continue to struggle with. Those things we try mightily to fight against, those character traits or repetitive sins, the ones we pray that the Lord would take away or help us conquer. Those sins that may disappear for a bit, only to come roaring back when we least expect them to, when we think we've licked them once and for all.

War has been declared, and It's raging within you today, if you're honest enough to admit it. And do you want to know a secret? It's not just you. That same war that is raging in your brothers and sisters in Christ, inside of them just like it is inside of you. We don't like to talk about it, but it's going on. It's going on in me. And it was even plaguing Super Apostle Paul, every day of His life. Listen to his confession in **Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** That's not Paul speaking about his life before conversion. He is speaking about himself at the very time he was writing the letter to the Romans. If you've ever felt wretched like that, Paul has some great words of comfort and hope.

Christ's Victory We Continue to Live in Through Repentance

Romans 7:25a Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Of course, Jesus is the answer. He's the Children's Message answer, right? But how is He the answer? Isn't He mad at us because we keep struggling with the same sin? Isn't He tired of hearing that same confession over and over? The answer to both is a resounding **NO!**

In your baptism all of your sins were washed away to the cross. All of them! That includes those you and I continue to struggle with. He knows you. He knew you would struggle with these sins even as He went to the cross to die for them. He took them upon Himself and gave His life for them all, because of His great and steadfast love for you. His victory at the cross trumps over your life of continued sin. And He wants you to know that.

In baptism we confess that the sinful nature is drowned, and it is. But as Luther once said, "It's an excellent swimmer". What is happening as the ongoing work of your baptism is that Sinful Nature no longer has uncontested rule in your heart and life. War has been declared and it has to do battle with your Redeemed Nature-that new heart and soul that comes as the gift of the Spirit by faith.

What are we called to do? Stand and fight, but not on our own. Christ has already won the victory over sin, death, and hell. The devil wants you to see these battles as evidence that in your case all is lost. But that's a lie. The Holy Spirit at work to point out in your life all these ways in which you give in to that Sinful Nature. He does this not to pound you down, but instead so that you will turn all of these sins over to Jesus. He tells you, "Yes, you gave in, again. Yes, you sinned, again. But Jesus took that from you and died for it. He took this one too, and that one, and that one, and even more of them that you don't even realize. He has covered all of them. Every time you lose the battle with the Sinful Nature know that Christ has conquered it for you. War has been declared. We stand and fight, but only by the power of and the work that the Spirit does in us through Confession and Absolution. And the Absolution tells us that Christ has won the final victory. Through your faith in Him He gives you credit for that victory now. And you will it in full on the Last Day: your victory that is Eternal Life.

Until then keep examining yourself. Don't be afraid to take an honest look at how the battle is going. You and I will fight and lose many battles. But the key thing is we keep fighting. We keep seeing sin as an awful thing that offends our gracious God. We keep alive that desire to obey our Lord and do what is right and make that our goal each and every day. We own up to those sins we struggle with and ask God's help to overcome them. And if and when we fail, we do not give up, because Christ did not give up on us. We see these sins through the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the Law for what they really are, sinful disobedience that makes us deserve eternal death. But we allow Him to turn our eyes to see our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Through the Spirit's work in the Gospel we see His death and resurrection is for you and for me. We hold fast to His pronouncement of complete victory over our sin, not just these that trouble us, but all of them.

This is our life lived out in repentant faith. We are given the strength and ability to see these battles for what they are. By themselves and without faith they would be utter defeat. But living in repentant faith in Christ, and through the ongoing work of our Baptism in Confession and Absolution, we see them for what they truly are, Christ applying His victory to our life.

Conclusion

War has been declared. We each fight this battle raging between our Sinful Nature and our Redeemed Nature. But we do not fight alone. We have the Holy Spirit at work in us to bring Christ's victory to bear on every single battle we feel we've lost and turn every single defeat over to Jesus. And through His life, death, and resurrection He will show you the truth, the real victory He has won completely and forever. And no amount of lies by the devil can change that. Know that that your brothers and sisters in Christ are struggling just as you are. Pray for them. Encourage them. Be a confidant to them when asked. And don't forget about your Pastor. For those sins that make you feel like a poor wretched man, private confession and Absolution can be a cure. It has been in my life. And what you tell me in the confidence of my Pastoral Office will not leave those office doors.

War has been declared. And Jesus is the victor. Our lives look like this: "I've sinned! I'm forgiven! I've sinned! I'm forgiven! I've sinned! I'm forgiven!" As dysfunctional as that may sound that is the life of a healthy and repentant believer in Jesus. And it will continue on that way, with Jesus' love and forgiveness always triumphing over your sin. And on the Last Day, when you stand before your Lord and Savior, your sinful self will be gone forever. You will fully live in His complete victory over sin and will do so forever. War has been declared. And Jesus has won for you the most decisive and complete victory. It's declared to be yours now, and will fully be so on the Last Day. Amen.