

SERIES A: FIFTH SUNDAY after PENTECOST

(July 5, 2020)

Romans 7:14-25

Faithful Image of Your New Life in Jesus: War-Waging Soldier

What would happen if well regarded platoon of soldiers who fought for the good guys fell into temptation by forsaking what they know to be good in order to act out their evil desires?

You would have a classic example of a fall from grace. This theme of a good guy succumbing to the evil desires of his heart is littered in novels and movies.

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is one such example in novels. Dr. Jekyll wanted to purify his good side from his evil side so he experiments and creates a potion that to separate good and evil in himself.

However, the separation of the sinister, Mr. Hyde, from the bonds of Jekyll's conscience did not free Jekyll from evil. Rather, the evil in Jekyll personified as Hyde only grew stronger to the point that Dr. Jekyll ceased to exist and only Mr. Hyde remained.

While Stevenson's novel portray Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as seemingly to separate characters of a decent man, Jekyll, and an utterly evil man, Hyde, St. Paul describes his struggle and the struggle of faithful believers within themselves against their sinful natures that has spread and reside in our bodies.

So St. Paul cries out "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" In our daily battles against our sinful nature, we too identify with Paul. We too confess that we are wretched people. We too confess that we need deliverance from our bodies of death.

We know we can't deliver ourselves from the crushing sentence of *guilty* by the Law's perfect requirements. Our daily and weekly experience informs us that deliverance must come outside of us, for it does not come from ourselves.

Paul asks "Who? Who is our deliverer?"

God. God delivers us from our bodies of death through Jesus Christ our Lord!

In our new lives of faith in the Spirit of Christ, Paul depicts us as soldiers who have

Desire

We want good and to do good. Most people will acknowledge desiring goodness, and from that flows good words and actions, as something everyone is obligated to agree and subsequently follow. Yet, not everyone agrees on what is good.

For some goodness is freedom in creating our own meanings to our experiences or the experiences of others, such as birthdays.

So we celebrate our birthdays (although at a certain age perhaps we would rather not remember how old we are!) and give an arbitrary meaning like celebrating our victorious entrance from the womb into the world, rather than praising God for his gift of life like Eve who praised God who gave life Cain, the first person created after the image of fallen Adam rather than the image of God.

For others, goodness primarily means doing what feels good and what gives us less stress. Do our brothers and sisters in church give us so much stress that we disobey God's command of frequently gathering together and receiving forgiveness that we need in order to live out our new life of faith in the Spirit of Christ?

If so, there is something wrong with us, our relationships with our brothers and sisters, and so our relationship with God. Our sinful natures have created a break, and in some cases a huge chasm in our horizontal and vertical relationships so that we desire what feels good rather than we God wills for us.

Yet, when we are led by the Spirit of Christ through the Word to desire and want good, i.e. the Law of God, and to do good according to God's commands to others, whether they be our physical and spiritual family or under the dominion of the devil, we find that

We lack the ability to do good. Even though we are delivered from God's just wrath and condemnation through our baptism, we still carry in our members original sin, yet our original sin that we inherited from our fallen parents, which results in actual sins against God and neighbour, are not counted against us by God for Jesus' saving work on the cross.

St. Augustine says that “Sin is forgiven in Baptism, not in such a way that it no longer exists, but so that it is not charged” (Against Julian).

Our sinful nature living in our bodies is always disobeying God, because it cannot trust God, but it trusts in itself, in human help, even help contrary to God’s will.

So don’t be surprised when trouble comes upon us for following God’s will or when suffering like stress and anxiety come upon us, and our first temptation is to disobey God’s will and our subsequent fall is to flee from the battle, which we ought to face and bear because of God’s commands.

This rebellion against God’s command to endure the heat of battle, which are allowed by God to occur in our daily lives so that we may exercise our faith and love for God and our love for others, is fought against by the Holy Spirit in our hearts in order to suppress and kill such rebellion and to produce in us new spiritual desires for God’s commands and the ability to follow them by the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Generally, people do what they delight in, but there are times as well when people do what they don’t delight in our are fighting against what they think to be evil or harmful to themselves or others.

St. Paul tells us that evil desires comes from sin in our fallen flesh and leads to actual sin. However, as soldiers of God who have been born again from above, we

Delight

In the Law of God in our minds. The war between Christ and his enemies the devil, the world, death, and our sinful natures has been won on the cross.

Where we have failed to desire the goodness, the Law of God by making up our own meaning of daily experiences rather than subscribing to the meaning that God’s gives them through His Word;

where we have coveted what feels good and peace against God’s will by fleeing the battle that God wants us to endure and go through that true and godly peace is extended to our neighbours;

God delivered us from the righteous charges of the Law against us and from the daily attacks of our sinful natures that would turn us into soldiers who have fled from fighting the good fight.

God delivers us from a bad conscience, which our sinful nature will manipulate in order that we become so ashamed and so guilty for failing to delight in God's Law and walking in it for the good of our neighbours, through our Lord Jesus who took all your sins and mine on the cross.

You can delight in the goodness of God's Law, for it is indeed good and righteous, in your mind, which continues to be renewed by the Holy Spirit every time you are led to receive forgiveness through the Word and the Lord's Supper.

However, we cannot delight in the Law of God

In our bodily members. The delight of our sinful flesh, our old Adam, that emerges from our corrupted bodies still tries to harm us and to have mastery over us. Like Mr. Hyde, our old Adam, would murder us so that it alone remained away from God's good Law and his saving Gospel in Christ Jesus.

When you and I sin, our old Adam would keep us down in the mud of sin by accusing us of truly not keeping what we believe to be good, God's commands and God's will.

Our old Adam may say to us "You haven't done your vocation as you should have. You have clearly failed in your relationships with your brothers and sisters. You have coveted peace, when God wanted you to go to battle against Christ's enemies. Do you think that you can still be delivered from God's wrath and condemnation?"

This is our old Adam wanting to deceive us into false belief and despair. Rather, when we are feeling like we don't belong to God's family, never mind being a faithful soldier waging daily battles against our sinful nature for God's glory and for the benefit of our neighbours, God wants and will deliver you.

This is a reason why he commands us to be daily in His Word and to frequently receive His Sacrament of the Altar—to richly give you and me forgiveness for our daily sins, even sins we are not aware of.

All faithful believers, even the most mature like St. Paul, struggle and battle daily with the sinful flesh. And we have no power or ability in ourselves to win the battles.

It's only the Holy Spirit who kills and drowns our old Adam in the death of Christ in our baptism. He brings us pure grace and mercy that delivers us from a bad conscience and strengthens us to follow in the way of Jesus.

God has now delivered you from your enemies, the world, death, our sinful natures, and Satan through the death and resurrection of your Jesus. Although, we do not see our deliverance from our enemies to the degree we would like, God's Word remains true: You have been delivered through Jesus Christ your Lord.

And your dear Father in heaven will fully and completely deliver you from your body of death in the resurrection, where he has prepared for you a glorious body fit for everlasting life, where all of God's enemies and workers of evil will be taken away from you.

This is God's gracious and merciful gift. It is yours. You have his guarantee in your baptism. You will be given this gift in His Supper for the forgiveness of your sins; for the strengthening of your trust in Him; when you are in the heat of battle, he will give you rest in Jesus who has died and risen for you. Amen.