

## Pastor Jon's July 9<sup>th</sup> 2023 Sermon

Based on Romans 7:15-25 and Matthew 11:25-30

I was at Good Will the other day when I went by the 1.99 DVD section. I scanned through it and found one of my favorite movies. I couldn't pass it up. It is Meet the Parents, with Ben Stiller, Robert DeNiro, Teri Polo, and Owen Wilson. Ben Stiller, who is Greg Focker, a male nurse, is all set to get engaged to his girlfriend Pam. But first, he must meet her parents. Pam's father Jack Byrnes, ex-CIA officer, takes an immediate dislike to Pam's truth bending boyfriend and tries to catch him in lies. I love this movie because the whole human condition is on display... there is mistrust, lying, addiction, jealousy. I enjoy when Greg, who is Jewish, is asked to say a table grace, when he quotes, "Day by Day". Also, Owen Wilson's character, Kevin, who is Pam's ex-boyfriend is still Jack's favorite. He had Kevin build and carve out of wood a wedding arch for Jack's other daughter who is getting married that weekend. The rehearsal dinner is at Kevin's house. And when Kevin gives a tour, he gives a nod to Jesus Christ when he shows off his craftsmanship. When talking about his carpentry, he said, "JC was a carpenter, who better to pattern your life after." I can relate to all the flaws in these characters in Meet the parents.

How many of you find yourself agreeing with the Apostle Paul in our second lesson when he says: "I do not understand my own actions... For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate"??? Can you relate? You are not alone.

I am thankful the Apostle Paul wrote this in his letter to the Romans. He describes the war that rages within each of us on our Christian walk. We are in a constant battle with the sin that dwells inside of us. We want to do better and be better, but it always seems we never get it just right.

Our words, choices, and actions can bring us and others down. I cannot tell you how many times I go to bed at night and say, "I could have done that better."

Paul says it's not him, but the sin that dwells within him. If you recall from other letters that Paul wrote, he was trained as a Pharisee... a lawyer or teacher of God's law. He knew God's law inside and out. And Paul thought he did a pretty good job of following God's law. In Philippians he considered himself blameless under the law. And yet, that didn't seem to set him free or give him comfort.

Martin Luther would describe this battle with the sin that dwells within us as the "bondage of the will." Luther would agree with Paul that sin dwells within us and that we humans are bent toward sinning. Sin is what turns us in on ourselves, it is our selfish parts, it is giving into our fleshly desires. We as Lutherans affirm the doctrine of original sin and admit that we are unable to change our basic will. But God still works with us and loves us. We can be turned by God the Holy Spirit working faith in us, through God's Word, that continuously molds us and shapes us according to God's will. It is like the bumper sticker, be patient with me, God isn't finished with me yet.

I know in my own family we all struggle with something... how about you and your families?

So, Paul asks, who will rescue us from this body of death? His response: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" There it is. The good news.

According to Romans, Jesus came to earth while we were still sinners. He didn't wait for us to figure it out or get it right. In fact, we are never going to get it right. But Jesus gets it right for us on the cross. He brought his kingdom to earth and taught us how to live and treat one another. He demonstrated his love for us on the cross where he opened his arms to all. He set us free from our bondage to sin. We receive this grace today in the word and sacrament. Following him does lead to life.

In our Gospel, Jesus commands his followers, "Come to me all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. What burdens are you carrying today? Here we have a command and promise. Jesus wants us to come to him. He invites us to lay our burdens on him. The promise is rest for your weary souls.

Jesus illustrates this through the metaphor of a yoke. When we come to Jesus he promises to be our yoke partner. Jesus probably grew up in the family business watching Joseph in the workshop making yokes for pairs of Oxen. The perfect yoke would balance out the burden between the two animals and make the burden light on each of them.

Our burden is the sin that dwells in us. Paul also described the weight of God's law as a burden as well. Jesus says his yoke is easy and his burden is light. In other words, he carries all the heavy lifting on our behalf... like the Footprints poem.

Let's take Jesus at his word. He invites us to "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest." May it be so!

Amen.