

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, May 23, 2023
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“The Good That I Would...”

READING: Romans 7:15-20, 24-25 – I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The Terminix man came to my house the other day for our annual termite inspection. He looked inside and outside the house and thankfully found no sign of termites. As he was doing it I thought back to my first interaction with the company. Back then they placed bait stations all around the house. These were green plastic cylinders that were sunk into the ground. Inside each cylinder was a bait of some kind that termites found irresistible. They would enter the bait station and eat a poison that I guess they fed to their young and all of them died. That was the idea at least. They don't use those anymore. They found that the bait worked so well that termites came from all corners and some of them decided not to wait at the station for their turn. Instead they began to chew on the house. The cure was worse than the disease.

The same thing happened when you used a Japanese Bean Beetle trap. Remember those? Some of them were housed inside a brightly colored plastic sunflower that you stabbed into the ground in your yard. The Japanese Bean Beetles caught a whiff of the bait contained inside and came at high speed, entered the trap, and couldn't get out. Death to all Bean Beetles! The problem was the beetles came in such numbers that some of them stopped off for a snack on your roses, flowers, green beans, and other munchies. You found yourself with more Japanese Bean Beetles than you would have had without the trap. The cure was worse than the disease!

St. Paul says much the same in what I call his “Do-Do Section” of Romans 7. He says that if we want to gain God's favor by doing good works and justifying ourselves by our own righteousness, then we are doomed to failure. He points out that as much as a person might desire to do good all the time, the truth is that sin is always there to show itself and taint every good intention we may have. His whole point is that if we think we can gain salvation by our own efforts, if we can perfect ourselves, we are in deep “do-do”! Doesn't work. Can't work. Won't work.

Worse yet, when people convince themselves of the possibility of gaining God's favor by doing good works, they blind themselves to their need for Jesus. If I can get to heaven by earning my place, then what do I need with a savior? Or, if Jesus just opened the door to heaven, but I have to climb the “ladder of righteousness” to get in, how much righteousness does it take? How many good works will get me there? And if I can pay for my sins with good works, who decides what constitutes a good work?

Paul says, “What a wretched man I am!” He says that for all of us. “There is no one who does what is right and never sins. No, not one.” (Romans 3:12) When people rely on works righteousness, the cure becomes worse than the disease because there are only two outcomes in that kind of life: despair or self-righteousness. Either a person despairs of ever being saved and becomes hopeless and fearful of God, or a person becomes proud of their own goodness and judgmental of others who don't or can't live up to their level of devotion.

In either case, the cure is worse than the disease.

When Paul concludes with, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” he speaks the good news of the Gospel to his listeners. We, as God’s people, do good works NOT IN ORDER to be saved, but because we ARE SAVED through Jesus’ merits alone. What a joyful outcome! What a rescue that is! If I had to save myself by doing good, the sin in me would doom me from the start. But because Jesus has already won salvation for me, I put my trust in him and in thanksgiving I do as much good as I can muster. And where I fail, I confess it and find forgiveness in Jesus alone. He is the True Cure for my sin disease, thanks be to God! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

- 1) This Sunday, May 28, our eighth-grade confirmands will be Confirmed in the faith. Come, hear them and encourage them in their commitments to Jesus. This year’s class is: Mattie Barker, Judah Kischnick, Tristin Lawhorn, Kendall Leis, Brianna Siebert, and Samantha Young.
- 2) Next Sunday, June 4, there will be a special Voters Assembly between the services to consider the appointment of Mitzi Lyon Schmelz to the new full-time position of Family Life Director. Mitzi served us 18 years as Youth Director, and we think she would be the perfect candidate to lay the foundation for this new ministry. I would invite you to attend at 9:15 in the Fireside Room.