

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, February 23, 2021
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Clean Up on Aisle Three”

READING: Romans 7:14-21, 24-25 – We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. 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. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me...What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Last Wednesday was “Ash Wednesday”, the first day of Lent. All across Christendom, Christians confessed their sins and received ashes upon their heads as a sign of penitence and a reminder of our mortality. “From dust you came and unto dust you shall return.” It’s a recognition that as we walk with Jesus to the Cross, we know that it is because of our sin that he takes that path. We and our sin required a substitutional sacrifice – and Jesus willingly becomes the sacrifice for our sin.

After Pastor Woods and I had finished applying ashes to all in attendance, I went to the baptismal font to clean up the finger I had been using. We had a small bowl of soapy water there and a couple of wash clothes. But here’s the problem: that ash we use is a finely ground ash from the burning of palm fronds – historically the fronds used on the previous Palm Sunday. That ash is so fine and so black that it is really difficult to wash it off. As I applied the water and the cloth, I discovered that now I had ash on my other hand as well. And it had also spread from the first finger to a second one. Rather than getting cleaned up, I was only making matters worse! In fact, the following morning I discovered that my fingers were still black and dingy.

Isn’t that the way sin works in a person’s life? We recognize our sinfulness. We make up our minds to “clean up our act”. Then we find that the sin has only compounded itself, and we are worse than before. It’s exactly St. Paul’s point in our reading for today. That section from Chapter 7 I have long called the “Do-Do Section”. Paul uses the word “do” or “does” some 22 times. He expresses the Christian’s dilemma. We know that God’s law is perfect, and we have a desire to keep that law perfectly, but when we are honest with ourselves, we discover that the very things we desire to do we do not do. And, the evil we abhor is the very thing we do. How disheartening!

This is the very knowledge that distinguishes Christian theology from the pagan religion of the world. The pagan, the unbeliever, tells himself that with some effort he can perfect

himself. His religion requires that of him. He must make the right sacrifices, say the right incantations, keep the right rituals, take the trip to Mecca, give alms, wear the right talisman, fast, suffer, chant, do, do, do! If he does enough, does it right, then “the gods” or Allah or “the Universe” may find him or her worthy of reward and favor. The Christian on the other hand realizes that what St. Paul says is true: I cannot perfect myself. I cannot DO enough to make up for the sin I continually do. I cannot make myself right with God. I sin even when I don’t “want to”. I am the “wretched man” in St. Paul’s picture - lost and condemned!

O give God thanks for our Savior Jesus Christ! O give thanks for Jesus’ steadfastness and determination to go to the Cross, to die my death and suffer my condemnation. O give thanks for the sweetness of the Gospel and the assurance the Scriptures give us that by trusting in Jesus, we already have God’s forgiveness so that we may stand righteous and without fear before the Throne, safe and at home in heaven. If we think we can clean up our own mess, well then, we’ll find ourselves in deep “doo-doo”! But, trusting in the Jesus of Good Friday and the risen Jesus of Easter, we stand clean and saved in Him! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

1) **SUGARBUSH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL** - We’ll be serving food out in Salem this weekend. It’s not too late to sign up to help. We’ll provide transportation to and from. Give Karen a call at the office and she can sign you up.

2) **DRIVE-THROUGH FISH FRY** – The preschool will offer a drive-through experience on Friday, February 26. You can pre-order your fish and set the time for pick-up by going to glcna.org. The next one is scheduled for March 12.

3) **WEDNESDAY LENTEN SERVICES**: Our series is entitled, “The Road to Perdition”. We will walk beside Jesus as he experiences the various events that lead to the Judgement Hall and the Cross on Good Friday. We’ll visit Lazarus’ Tomb, go get the donkeys for the ride into Jerusalem, watch Jesus cleanse the Temple, listen as he bests the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law when they try to trick him, see Mary anoint his feet, and we’ll be humbled as Jesus washes the Disciples’ feet. Join us on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM.