**Sermon Romans 7:15-25 – Pentecost 6A - 9/7/23**

Sermon Videolink: <https://youtu.be/HdXZsQb64m0>

When you hear the words, “and they all lived happily ever after,” what kind of story does it remind you of? I think most would agree that is how fairy tales often end. They are called fairy tales because they are not true.

In your typical fairy tale, after many twists, turns and challenges, in the end, the prince and princess get married and live happily ever after. In real life, a couple who are deeply in love and committed to each other gets married, and the real challenge of living together begins. Sooner than later, they find out that if they are going to make their relationship work, each of them will have to make significant changes in the long term. Even after 20, 30 or 50 years together, there may be challenges as each of them changes as they age and mature.

The Christian life is the same as any serious long-term relationship. Living the Christian life does not mean you will experience a life of continual calm and bliss. It is not the case that once you are Baptised and proclaim your faith in Christ you have suddenly arrived at being a fully mature Christian. Rather all of us who belong to Christ are always in the process of becoming Christians.

Have you ever watched a potter moulding clay on a potter’s wheel? It is fascinating to watch, but it sure looks very uncomfortable for the clay. We are always a work in progress, being moulded and shaped by God through Word and Sacrament into the people he has planned for us to be. At times that moulding, and shaping can be very challenging.

As Christians, we are never perfect on this side of the grave. We are always in the process of becoming godly and holy. We are always in the process of becoming healthy. We are always exercising to get fit. We are always on the way to becoming the perfect children God has planned for us to be. Only at our resurrection will we finally arrive. In the meantime, we live imperfect lives as both saints and sinners.

This should not surprise us because not one of the great saints in the Bible ever arrived at perfection. They all struggled to live the life God had called them to. Even the great apostle Paul had struggles. We hear about it today in his letter to the Romans, where he says, *“Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me.****22****For in my inner being(*[*H*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A15-25&version=NIV#cen-NIV-28114H)*) I delight in God’s law;(*[*I*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A15-25&version=NIV#cen-NIV-28114I)*)****23****but I see another law at work in me, waging war(*[*J*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A15-25&version=NIV#cen-NIV-28115J)*) against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin(*[*K*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+7%3A15-25&version=NIV#cen-NIV-28115K)*) at work within me.****24****What a wretched man I am!”* (Rom. 7:21-24, NIV).

Eventually, most of us know the basics of what makes relationships work. Respect for others, keeping control of our anger and avoiding any form of violence, loyalty and in marriage, fidelity. We also know that honesty, being aware of the other person’s feelings and needs, seeking the best for the other is important. Being careful how we use our tongue when speaking to and speaking about the other person is important. These basics and many other things that make relationships work are all summed up in the commandments God handed to Moses.

Most of us know the basics, yet we still mess up our relationships. There is something inside us that seems to take control in certain situations and no matter how good our intentions we end up doing what we tell ourselves we don’t want to do. “I wasn’t going to get angry but once again my buttons were pushed.” “My spouse is important to me but once again I let my work, my hobby, or something else I wanted to do distract me.” “I know I shouldn’t have lied, but I was afraid they would be upset, angry or disappointed with me.” “I was so upset I ended up opening my big mouth about it to someone else and now it has all blown up.”

Paul identifies this thing that causes us to mess up. He calls it the sinful nature which is living in him. This sin is living in his flesh. The sinful nature in his flesh is at war with his mind's intention to do good. As a result, Paul says that, *“the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice”* (Rom 7:19, NIV). I think we can all identify with Paul’s frustration. There are some things we know we should not do, and we don’t want to do. We tell ourselves again and again, “Next time I will be different.” The next time comes and guess what?

It appears, with some things, no amount of willpower or determination, no amount of knowledge about what is right or wrong and no amount of fancy techniques, can change the way we behave. Sometimes it can feel like it is all too hard and that you should simply give up. Sometimes we too, like Paul, may feel like we are wretched people.

Paul may have felt terribly miserable and disappointed when his behaviour did not measure up but that is not where he stayed. Instead of wallowing in misery, Paul turned to the one place he could always find certain hope. Listen to what he says, *“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Rom. 7: 24-25, NIV). When Paul messed up, he turned to Jesus.

What did Paul find when he turned to Jesus? What will we find when we turn to Jesus? The first thing you find when you turn to Jesus is “no condemnation.” Instead, when you turn to Jesus you will always find forgiveness because nothing you do, nothing that happens to you, neither death nor life, neither angels or demons nor any other powers can separate you from the love of Christ. That also means nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God that you have received in and through Christ Jesus your Lord (see Rom 8: 38-39).

When you struggle to live the life you want to live, turn to Jesus and be forgiven. Turn to Jesus and receive his spirit, the Holy Spirit who will cleanse you, renew you and change you. Receive the Holy Spirit who was present in the beginning breathing life into creation. Receive the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will create love within you toward God and toward your fellow human beings. Turn to Jesus and good deeds will flow out of your life, even though you may not recognise them. Turn to Jesus in the midst of the struggle of life and find peace and rest for your soul.

**Amen.**

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