

Lenten Devotional March 16, 2021

Scripture

Romans 7:13-25

13 Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. 14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. 15 I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17 But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23 but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Devotional

The Rev. Trevor Jamison '01

Do you live your life based on the viewpoint that people are generally good or generally bad? And if you're a preacher, do you preach from the perspective that people are generally good or generally bad? I have had to rein in my tendency to regard people as good, but preach about them as bad.

One sure sign that not all is well with the world, including the people in it, is the great number of situations for which there is no perfect answer or outcome. Even our best turns out bad in some ways. Industrialization brings great wealth for many (though not all), but it wrecks the planet everyone depends upon for life itself. I seek the best for my child, though I'm aware that in a situation of limited resources my doing so means someone else's child will have to go without.

Good things, such as wealth, creation, parental love, and even God's gift of "the law," says Paul, can and often do become occasions for wrong, not right. Sin, it seems, is not just about you or me acting badly—it's a condition affecting individuals, human systems, and the world itself.

Yet Paul doesn't write to rub our noses in the mess we make of life, individually or collectively, so that we despair. He writes to give us hope. He points us toward God, the Creator of this world, as the One who saves the world: "Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

So, as followers of Jesus, we try to do the right thing—for ourselves, for our nearest and dearest, and for those we hardly know. When that doesn't work out well (as often it doesn't), even if we're tempted to despair we remain hopeful, for salvation from this less-than-good situation depends not on us—it comes from the God made known to us in Jesus Christ.

Prayer

God of all creation, thank you for all that's good with your world—and for making yourself known in your Son, Jesus Christ. Encourage me to walk in your ways, and rescue me, I pray, on those occasions I fail to do so; for You are my hope and my salvation. Amen.