**Romans 7:14-25a July 5, 2020**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from our Epistle lesson, Romans 7 here re-reading these words. “For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Any family that has a loved one who serves in the armed forces will tell you that the freedom that we are blessed and privileged to have in this country, came with a price. Freedom isn’t free, and on a weekend of celebration, albeit different this year with the restrictions in place due to the pandemic, we have to remember that the fourth of July wouldn’t be celebrated, if it wasn’t for the sacrifices made by the soldiers who fought to win our freedom. This becomes a day of remembrance for the work that those in the armed forces did in the past, and still continue to do today. For them, they are trained to go into battle, to face their fears, and to persevere in the face of adversity. We see this portrayed in movies and television shows, and there has been something made for just about every war, but I always find myself returning to watch the HBO mini-series “Band of Brothers”. I’ve referenced this show before in e-mails and first experienced the show in college when my college roommate insisted that I had to see it one year. The show follows a group of paratroopers during World War II who fought at Normandy, who were part of the battle of the bulge, and who even ended up taking Adolf Hitler’s mansion right before the end of the war. In one particular episode, it tells the story of a soldier named Albert Blithe, who had met up with the rest of the company after D-Day. Blithe was suffering from extreme stress and shock, at one point he even goes temporarily blind. He tells the story about how on the day that they were parachuting into Normandy he landed in a field, and stayed there, too afraid to go out and fight. He stayed there for a few days before he even went looking for anyone. In one of the final scenes of the episode we see Blithe hiding in a trench as there is a firefight between American and German forces, and just when it seems Blithe is going to give up, his commander shows up and encourages him. He tells him he’s not alone, and we see Blithe stand up, load his rifle, and get back into the fight. The episode’s message was that while Blithe was a soldier in a war against enemy forces, the true battle was going on inside of himself.

We all are in a similar battle with ourselves when it comes to sin. We can choose to fight, or we can choose to surrender. The life of a Christian is one called to fight, which is what Paul is talking about in our Epistle lesson. Last week Paul spoke about the importance of recognizing that the Law reveals sin which by no means makes the Law evil in any way, but instead shows our evil actions and our accountability to what we have done wrong. This week Paul is showing that in the knowledge of what is wrong and what is right, we should be actively fighting the desire to do the wrong thing, and encouraging and willing ourselves to do what is right. The battle wages in us as we are both simultaneously saint and sinner, redeemed and yet still covered in sinful flesh, which brings about the struggle. “But I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.”

So the fight continues throughout our entire lives, for we all were born into sin, and we all have a natural knowledge of right and wrong in our conscience but also our education in not just the Catechism, but a continued study of God’s Word. But how does the battle go? A resounding victory when faced with opposition? That certainly wasn’t the case in the scene that Paul is describing. “I do not understand my own actions” He says “For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” The battle rages but it sounds like Paul is on the losing end. While the troops are lined up on the battle field, they are failing, they can’t seem to get things right. They want to defeat the enemy but no matter what they do they can’t destroy sin on their own. They want to, but they can’t. Not by themselves, not with their own actions, no matter how hard they try and no matter how hard they want to.

This is our lives in the battle, the constant disappointment of our failures to sin. We aren’t able to perfect ourselves by our own actions, no matter how hard we try to make ourselves perfect the blemishes will still show themselves in the failure to do right all the time, and the giving in to doing wrong. Which means that the enemy is never eradicated completely while we are here on this Earth. Our hatred for sin shows the evidence of faith in our hearts, the guilt and shame that we feel after committing sin is another sign that we know that our sin is wrong, yet we still sin. We still give in. Our very nature is sin from the moment we were born, so in a sense we are fighting a battle with defective weapons, with bad intel, with a very poor starting position. The enemy seems to know our every move, to counter our actions, to have the high ground in the fight. So we lose, over and over and over again.

Which leads to excuses. It’s not our fault, we didn’t decide to sin and eat the fruit, it was Adam and Eve, it was Satan who deceived them, it’s not my fault. My Father struggled with this, and I do too, it’s not my fault, it’s his! My mother always was this way, and so I learned it from her, it’s not my fault, it’s hers! This is silly, this is pointless, if I’m going to sin anyway why even resist these temptations? After all God is just going to forgive me, God knows I can’t possibly be perfect on my own, what’s the point? Why even try? Why even struggle? Why should I even care?

And so, when we land into battle, we sit. We do nothing. The excuses pile up and we can think of so many better reasons to not fight and war against the sin in ourselves than to go out and just fail again. Like a soldier who turns and walks away from the battle, or hides in a crater, or who is so weak from the fighting that their body can’t handle the stress, we too feel beaten down, wearied and tired from the fight. What’s the point? Why even try? The temptation is even to turn and blame God for this entire situation, that it’s God’s fault we have to face these trials, that it’s that wretched and cursed God who has caused us all this pain. Yet Paul’s words point us to the true problem. “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

Jeremiah in our Old Testament lesson describes prisoners who are freed from a waterless pit, one that you could even imagine Joseph being thrown into by his brothers. You claw, and you fight, and you try to climb but no matter how hard you try, you are stuck there. That’s sin. No matter how hard we try ourselves, we can’t get free, we can’t destroy it on our own, we can’t be strong enough, smart enough, or good enough. But that doesn’t mean we should give in to despair. That doesn’t mean we should leave the struggle or give in to the fight against sin, instead it should lead us to a proper place of repentance. When it comes to our actions, we are as guilty as Albert Blithe, we are as guilty as the worst sinner in the world, in comparison to others we never put ourselves higher. Wretched man that I am! The blame doesn’t go to Adam and Eve, our parents, our world, our upbringing, those are excuses. The passing of the buck on why we do the terrible things we do and the reason we don’t do the good we know we should has to lie with ourselves. I am the problem. I am a sinner. I am coated and covered in this flesh that will constantly lead me to sin. To the point of not understanding our own actions. To the point of not doing the good that we want to do, but instead doing the evil that we do not want to. We are responsible for that. Wretched sinners that we are. Stuck in the waterless pit. Unable to free ourselves.

Yet we are free, for in that understanding and recognition of sin, in confessing our sins to God and lying before him our unworthiness, we are as little children. Which means that when Jesus in our Gospel lesson says, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.” That the child understands that they receive strength and help from the one who loves them, and in the same way we have received Christ. We have received the rest of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’s perfection, because in that perfect robe of righteousness comes the rest and calm of knowing that the work is done. That the war has been won, and the battles of this earth will not last forever. It is a calm that can only come when the greatest of responsibilities has been alleviated and taken on by someone else. The debt that hung over our head? Paid. The work that had to be done or else we would have lost everything? Done. “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” A true rest, not a break from the action, not a 5-minute nap or a short water break and then back out onto the field of battle, but a true and lasting rest in the fellowship of God, in the presence of our Almighty Father and Savior for all eternity.

That eternal rest is to come, but for now we come together to receive the rest of His presence in His house, the rest of hearing the truth that we are saved by His actions and not our own, and the rest and fellowship we receive from each other, even if we have to stay socially distanced, or talk to each other behind a mask. So that we in those moments, as we leave this place, can dust ourselves off, can grab that rifle, and be encouraged to go back into the battle with renewed energy to face this sinful world and our sinful selves, to battle against the sinner inside of us, to serve the Lord in gladness.

Albert Blithe survived that firefight, the episode shows that he had made peace with himself and was back in the fight. A few days later it was reported that a sniper shot him, and he was taken home. He never returned to war, but died in 1967. May we, in the moments of this life when the battle seems too hard, when the enemy of sin seems too strong, be strengthened by the true Word of God that authoritatively tells us that the war has been won, and that a home waits for all of us, a home with God, in peace and quietness, where there is no pain, no sadness, no sorrow and no enemies and where we will receive a true and everlasting, rest. A place where we will be truly free, a freedom that was paid for with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.