

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 13, 2014

Romans 7:15-25¹

Part I

We have all heard how the United States has been dragged into a conflict. It is, because the Islamic State, known as ISIS, has challenged and threatened the United States with brutal acts of murder. So, President Obama has consulted with members of congress, planned strategy with allies and spoken to the the country on how he intends to confront the enemy.

We have also heard in the news that ISIS has far-reaching tentacles. That is, it has successfully recruited Westerners to its cause. Two of them, who have turned up dead, were United States citizens. They aren't the only two. There are more within our border, who are suspected recruits for ISIS. What it tells us is that there is an enemy within. It seeks to harm us. Today's text also talks about such an enemy – an enemy within. Every Christian has that enemy. The enemy within is a source of conflict each one of us. It is, because the enemy within wants to take us down, bring us into captivity and destroy us. Its a conflict for the territory of our lives. So, who are the opponents in this conflict? It is a conflict between “I” and “the sin that dwells in me;” between the “flesh” and the “inner man;” between the old Adam and the new man. These two are in constant conflict.

Part II

It all *began* when you and I were baptized. God cast out of our hearts another enemy, the devil. The devil held us in captivity. He did because of unbelief. However, when those waters were poured out on us, God disarmed the devil, bound him, and took you as his spoils. When he did, you were like a new person. You were created anew in Christ Jesus. That's your “inner man,” the “I” of which Paul speaks. We will call it the new self. The new self agrees that the law is good, yes, delights in the

law. He does, because, because at the heart of the law is self-giving love. It tells us how to love God and how to love our neighbor.

As a Christian, though, there is a *second* side to your person. That second side is what Paul calls the “sin that dwells in me;” the “flesh.” We will call it the old Adam. The old Adam means that we are chips off the old block. We are, because when Adam fell into sin he could only father sinners.

Unlike the new self which delights in God's law, the old Adam hates God's law. So he rebels against it. He does, because the law teaches us to be self-giving, but the old Adam is self-seeking. He is self-centered.

Part III, a

It is these two enemies that clash in the battlefield of your person. They pick up arms and battle against one another. Paul describes that battle. “The good I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not do do, that I practice.”

So the battle plays out this way, “I know I ought to do good, but I omit doing it.” Those are called *sins of omission*. Its like a teammate on a football squad. He is supposed to fill the gap to protect the quarterback. When he doesn't, he *omits* doing what he is supposed to do...and the quarterback gets sacked. In such a way the law tells us the good we are *supposed* to do, but we *omit* doing the good.

I know that I am supposed to trust God. I want to trust God. I do, but it gets hard when I see all the bad things happening in the world. I see what ISIS is doing and it is so brutal; so wrong. How can God let that all that happen? So I end up not doing the good, trusting God; and the old Adam wins.

I know that I am supposed to do good to those who hate me, like Jesus said in today's Gospel. After all, God tells me to turn the other cheek, but the pain is too much. I can't do them good when the hurt is so bad. The hurt makes me want to give them the cold shoulder. Its what they deserve. So...I end up not doing the good; and the old Adam wins.

I know I am supposed to be a good student, you children say, I want to do good, but when my friend passes me a note in class, I can't ignore him. He's my friend and I don't want him to get mad at me. I will try and be sneaky about it so that the teacher doesn't see me. So...I end up not doing the good; and the old Adam wins.

Part III, b

Then there is the other field of the battle. "The evil I don't want to do, that I practice." I know I shouldn't do the evil, but I can't help committing it. These are called *sins of commission*. Its like that teammate on the football squad, again. He not supposed to have unsportsmanlike conduct. He isn't, but when his pride gets bruised he can't help throwing a punch...and someone gets hurt. In such a way we are *not supposed* to do evil, but we *commit* it anyway.

I know that I am not supposed to worry. I don't want to worry. I don't, but when I read the news and hear what is going on with ISIS and its recruits, it eats me up. I am afraid of what the future holds. I fear for my children. I shudder to think that I will break under the strain. I don't want to worry, but I do; and the old Adam wins.

I know that I am not supposed to grumble. I don't want to do grumble. I don't, but I do. I do because I see what my neighbor has. I see the success he has. I do and I am not happy with who I am or what I have. I won't be until I get what I think I should have; or, am who I think I should be. No. I don't want to grumble, but I do; and the old Adam wins.

I know I am not supposed to fight with my brother and sister or with my classmate, you children say. I don't want to do wrong. I don't, but I do. I can't help it. He or she hurt me. It made me so mad. I want to get even with them. He or she deserves it. I don't want to do wrong, but I do; and the old Adam wins.

Part IV

This is the clash that each one of us suffers. It is the clash within our person. Paul summed it up this way. "Evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good." That's how it is as long as we live in this world. It

is because we have the enemy within; the old Adam is with us until the day we leave this veil of tears.

So, your person is this battlefield; and, suffers this clash between the old Adam and the new self. The old Adam is bent on winning that conflict. So he makes war against the new self. He takes you captive. Captive you are a prisoner of war, as it were. Desperate, you cry out with Paul, "O, wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" That's how it is for prisoners of war. When you think of prisoners of war, they often suffer *desperate* conditions. They are locked up in rat infested compounds or behind bars in dingy cells. Food rations are meager and scant. The captors mistreat and abuse the prisoners.

It was like that in a prisoner of war camp during World War II . The camp was in the Pacific theatre at Cabanatuan. Five hundred of our soldiers were held prisoner there. Their conditions were brutal. They suffered disease. They were underfed. They feared they were to be executed. Their *only hope* was for someone to come to their rescue.

Part V

...someone did. While they languished in prison, some volunteers put their lives on the line and came to the rescue. One hundred Rangers and Scouts traveled thirty miles behind enemy lines to reach the prison camp. They struck at night, surprised the enemy and successfully rescued the prisoners. Then, the Rangers and Scouts escorted the prisoners to safety.²

...Someone came to your rescue, too. Jesus. He went behind enemy lines. He put his life on the line. He went to the cross and clashed with the devil, the ally of your old Adam. The devil tried to get Jesus to surrender. Jesus wouldn't. He shed his blood and died in your place. Three days later he came back from the dead. He came back, triumphant over sin and the devil. Because he did, all your sins of omission; sins of commission; the sin that is in you is forgiven, full and free.

That means the devil no longer has a hold on you. He doesn't, because Jesus broke into your heart by his word in baptism. He pulled you out of

the devil's clutches. He rescued you from him and his ally, your old Adam. They can't hurt you anymore.

Delivered from them, Jesus escorted you to his infirmary, the church. Here, *in his word*, he nurses you back to health. He binds up your wounds suffered from the old Adam. He heals your contusions received in the clash from the devil. He bandages you with the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation. Bandaged by the gospel, he allies himself with your new self.

Allied with him, you have Jesus on your side; and Jesus is bigger than your old Adam and the devil put together. He is, because Jesus is God. Because he is, no matter how your old Adam contends against your new self; no matter what you see going on in the world; no matter how bad it may get, Jesus is with you. He is, as the psalmist said, “your shield about you.”³ Shielded by him, you are safe in his care.

Then, at the last, Jesus will rescue you completely. He will deliver you from this veil of tears. He will bring you to his kingdom where this conflict will finally be over. In the resurrection, Jesus will give you your body back. It will be cleansed of the old Adam. Then there will be no more fighting and clashing; no more enemy within. It will all be done and over.

Today, Jesus gives you a taste of that victory at this table. He gives you his body and blood shed to rescue you from your old Adam and its ally, the devil. He lifts your eyes to the day when he will come for you and bring you out of this conflict. He tells you, you win. You win, because he won. No wonder Paul exclaims, and our new self with him, “I thank God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Amen!

¹References to the text (NKJ) will not be cited in the sermon

²wikipedia.org/wiki/Raid_at_Cabanatuan

³Psalm 3.2