

Life is hard. Making a living, building relationships, providing for our families, keeping house, completing school—there’s no end to the challenges we confront every day. But there is victory, victory in Christ. This morning we’re going to talk about what kind of difference this victory makes in our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

ROMANS 7:14-25

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For 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 with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ 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.²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

Life is hard. Besides the things we contend with which are outside of us, St. Paul reminded us in his letter to the church in Rome of the struggles we have with the things that our inside of us, in our own hearts. He wrote, **Romans 7:18: I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.** Life is hard.

This is not something we’re proud of. We don’t wear t-shirts with the words, **“Nothing Good Dwells Within Me!”** We don’t buy books with titles like, **“I Have**

the Desire to do What Is Right, but not the Ability to Carry It Out”! No, we want solutions. We want role models!

But, alas, solutions and role models are hard to come by.

And the world doesn't help us either. In fact, as Paul writes in the first chapter of Romans, the people of this world, though they **“know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things as they do are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:32)**. Turn on the TV for 5-minutes and you'll see nothing has changed. Life is hard.

Paul wrote, **Romans 7:19, 24, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.... Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

We don't like this because it doesn't work on a graph which shows continuous improvement. You can't sell this. No one wants a wristband that says, “WMTIA!” or **“Wretched Man That I Am!”** or sing a hymn with the lyrics, **“The evil I do not want is what I keep on doing”?!**

Perhaps the old saw is right, that we should eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we may die!

But there is a solution. St. Paul himself had the answer all along. He wrote, **Romans 7:24-25, “Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Despite Paul's ongoing battle with sin, he found peace in his heart because of **“Jesus Christ our Lord.”** Please say it with me. (Jesus Christ our Lord.)

This is our confession, and it is the only answer to our struggle with sin and temptation. Life is hard, but we have victory in **“Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

In Him and in Him alone is our peace! **“Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

With this confession, Paul wrote, **Romans 8:1, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

According to Paul, we’ve got everything upside down when we look at ourselves and try to find God, which is what most Christian self-help books encourage us to do. What Paul was saying was that everything we want and need can and will be found in our acceptance of Christ’s acceptance of us.

Christ’s acceptance of you and me is real. Consider Jesus’ words in the Gospel, **Matthew 11:28-30, He said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

When Jesus said, **“Come to me,”** he didn’t do so with conditions. There were no strings attached to his invitation, as in, “Come to me IF you’re a good person, or “Come to me IF you believe all the right stuff, or “Come to me IF your thoughts are pure.” But he said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.”**

I like this a lot because my success is often measured by a whole bunch of conditions, like whether or not I was loving enough, or efficient and effective enough, or smart enough. Indeed, I labor and I am **“heavy laden”** by many demands.

Perhaps you feel the same way. But it’s tiring, isn’t it? I’m tired of having to put up, to measure up! So when Jesus invites us unconditionally with the words, **“Come to me,”** we breathe a sigh of relief.

But what’s he inviting us to? Again, he said, **“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you REST.”** Now that sounds like a pretty good deal! Maybe slow down, spend more time with friends and family, read a book, go to a game, travel.

But the kind of rest Jesus was talking about was a spiritual rest, shalom, an inner peace and contentedness,
that place where there is forgiveness of sins and eternal life,

that place where we embrace the truth that God is our Father and he provides everything we need for this body and life,
that place where we can say with confidence the Spirit of God lives in me and he gives my life meaning.

With God's promise on our hearts, with St. Paul we can say, **"Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"**

"Jesus Christ our Lord." Please say it with me. (Jesus Christ our Lord.)

Jesus said, **"Take my yoke upon you."** In his day the image of a yoke was used to illustrate the relationship between a rabbi and his students. When a student followed the teachings of his rabbi, he was under the rabbi's yoke.

So when Jesus said, **"Take my yoke upon you,"** He wasn't talking about bearing another burden, as if we were farm animals. But he was encouraging us to learn from him. He said it himself. **"Take my yoke upon you, and LEARN from me."** This is NO yoke!

Jesus said, **"I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find REST for your souls."**

There's that word **"rest"** or shalom again. That's the purpose of the Lord's teaching here, that is, that we would learn from him in order to find rest for our souls. If we could do that one thing, if we could live in the shalom of Jesus, we could do anything. Therein is our strength. Therein is our victory. For when we rest in the assurance and hope of Jesus, he is truly the Lord of our lives. This is a message which the church could preach which the world could not easily ignore.

Jesus said, **"I am gentle and lowly in heart."** **"Lowly"** literally means "to be close to the ground." Indeed, the Lord has come very close to the ground, hasn't he? He came down to you and me where we have fallen flat on our faces with discouragement and self-condemnation. And he says, **"Come to me."**

Friends in Christ, we make everything so complicated when really it's as simple as believing Jesus loves us and he wants to have a relationship with us.

Again, Jesus said, “**Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**” But the world cries out, “No, come to me! Come into the disaster, come into the darkness, and despair for your life!”

But Jesus said, “**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**” But the world keeps telling us to take on more burdens, more debt, more responsibilities, and prove yourself!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you don’t have to prove yourself to anyone. For the Lord has already laid a claim on your life. You are his son, his daughter;

you were clothed with Jesus’ righteousness in the waters of Holy Baptism;
your life is filled with the life of the Lord at his altar in and with the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Jesus.

Jesus said on the Cross, “**It is finished.**” This means he completed all the work necessary to bring us into the presence of God Almighty. Because that work is done, indeed, we may rest in him, trust in him, rely on him, live in him, believe and hope in him.

Life isn’t so hard after all.... when we rest in “**Jesus Christ our Lord.**” Please say it with me. (Jesus Christ our Lord.)

This week let us meditate on God’s Word, not as an obligation but as an opportunity to be filled with the teachings of Jesus that we may learn and grow in our understanding of his love for us.

This week let us seek the Lord, answering his call, that we may enter into his shalom.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.