#32 10-11
Genesis 24:34-38, 42-49, 58-67
Psalm 45:10-17
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
Romans 7:15-25a

Jesus as Savior from 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!**

This does sound really confusing to me, and I really didn't want to preach on it – but I asked Becky DeLameter for advice on which text I should preach from and she gave me compelling reasons for all three. But then she said something about this text that had been haunting me already. I wanted to deny it – but she came right out and said the reason why I wanted to avoid this scripture – and that was because it makes so little sense on first casual reading.

I can do fine at avoiding uncomfortable things, until I realize I am avoiding them – and then there is some part of me that begrudgingly goes where I don't want to, as if I am a bug mysteriously being drawn to the bug zapper.

There was another reason why I was drawn to this scripture and it was a vague awareness of some theological idea relating to this scripture.

At the men's breakfast (which I slipped into either because I wanted to make sure they weren't going to talk about me behind my back, or maybe it was because I wanted someone to serve me breakfast, or maybe still, I just really like gatherings of people regardless of the gender) but anyway, we had been talking about a variety of fascinating topics including, the evolution of the awareness of God and the development of Monotheism – among other topics. And at some point in the discussion I was disturbed, once again, by encroachment of human weakness in society that affects a compassionate and just society. Now – I am sorry if that sounded more

confusing than what Paul wrote – but it is the best I can do at describing that which has been stirring in my psyche.

Let me see if I can put it another way – laws are mostly good. They have mostly been made, in free societies (which ours counts as one of the freest), to right some perceived wrong at some point in time. But then humanity gets involved and things can get all slippery. We start focusing more on the law than on the justice issue. That law becomes our code of behavior and we can then sometimes use the law to become intolerant and cruel. When we focus only on the law – even if it is religious doctrine – and we overlook the human factor – we can discover that we are being cruel – we are sinning. But just as I like to avoid that which makes me uncomfortable, humans then want to focus on the law and avoid the fact that justice has stopped being served.

Let's take the civil rights movement, for example. The law was blacks and whites were to be separated. And when the followers of the civil rights era flaunted their humanity and dared to non-violently break the

laws by drinking out of "whites only" fountains, or sitting at "whites only" sections in the restaurants, or brazenly marching in public making the injustices clear as day – who was actually, in God's eyes, sinning? Was it the humans who courageously struggled for justice? Or was it the police who would violently and sometimes brutally enforce the law?

Paul is basically saying that our human failings – our secret fears and anxieties – can surprise even the most devout of us all. We can struggle with all our energies to contemplate the right and just action to take, and still find ourselves being in the wrong – causing pain.

Now – I hate talking about sin. I guess that is the one topic that I would go out of my way to avoid talking about. That is my greatest theological challenge; perhaps because every so often theologians have used that word and the power that goes behind, it to shame and manipulate people. Often it seemed to me that sin was so very personal and it would help no one to try to force another into awareness before they are ready.

There is such a thing as not being ready to face one's inner demons – we can't really become aware of some of our sins until we are ready, regardless of how often others may try to point them out to us. And then – BOOM – we can be utterly blown away by that awareness.

I believe this is what Paul is referring to in this scripture text, "For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

And it becomes easier and easier to ignore those hidden sins from ourselves when we place justifications around them – laws – some of them being actual governing laws – and some of them being behavioral beliefs – and some of them purely preferences – but any kind of thought that builds walls around our souls to separate us from God and the rest of humanity is a sin, and all of us do that. It is human nature to want to protect ourselves.

It is that disconnect with God and humanity that causes all kinds of

Focusing on these personal "laws" these controlling actions – *that* can totally blind us to God's will. We discover suddenly that we are doing things we don't really want to do, causing pain and not really understanding how we got there. Paul said, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand."

EVERYONE DOES THIS!!! There is no human throughout history that has no flaws! And we could get totally distraught over this! Those humans who care about sin – care about love and justice and God and doing the best for this world – we are the ones for whom our sin can become unbearable.

The wiser we become, the more we are aware of the injustices in life. And injustices happen every single day. People are falsely sentenced to jail – children starve to death – animals are abused – people manipulate the laws in order for their own gain – one could really lose faith and hope that there is a God – that God is just and fair – that humanity will be able to survive!

And yet, Paul ends this text with, "Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus suffered physical pain – he was accused of all kinds of evil – he suffered and did not succumb to what we all can slip into – anger, fear, retribution, rage, sadness – Jesus lived his life to the fullest for as long as he could. He showed his followers understanding, compassion, comfort, love, forgiveness – he did not sin. He was selfless.

So when we discover our failings – when we succumb to our basest of selves – we are NOT left alone there in our shame. For decades the terms, "Jesus Saves" meant nothing to me – I would say the words, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior" because I knew that was what I was supposed to say – and because I thought if I said it enough I would one day understand what it meant. And in my times of awareness, when I know that I have sinned – as only each of us can know in our own time and space – that is when the words, "Jesus is my savior" have made sense.

For when we are faced with the hopelessness of the awareness of our inability to avoid sin – our only life jacket from the oceans of despair is a Lord who has also suffered – who has proven in everything that he taught, said and did – that he understands what it is like to be human in an unjust world – that gentle compassionate Lord is our inspiration – our guiding light – our savior from sin. Cling to him.