

Pentecost 4 7/6/14
Romans 7:14-25a 9A

“FOR I DELIGHT IN THE LAW OF GOD, IN MY INNER BEING” – V 22

Under the banner of “My Summer Vacation,” there is one bad thing to come out of my sojourn to the continent of Europe. I must confess that, once again, one my teachers was right and I was wrong.

Mr. Larson taught history and social studies at WHS. He had a brother in the Navy stationed at some place in Europe, so they spent a month traveling across the continent and Mr. Larson has many slides of his adventure. {Yes, slides, I am dating myself am I not!}. So, when the subject of the day was the history of England, Mr. Larson would show slides of castles and landmarks of Britain. Romans, then he would show slides of Roman ruins in Italy.

I honestly don't remember what the subject matter of the day was or how it was brought up, but Mr. Larson was again expounding the wonders of visiting the Europe and young, skull-full-of-mush, 15, 16-year old Toby – every teacher's favorite student, I would add, but I digress -- saw no reason to visit Europe. After all, there were no NFL games in Europe at that time and they didn't play baseball in Europe, so what was the big deal?! Why go there? Mr. Larson, patiently, kindly, tried to impress upon me, that I would one day, want to go to Europe.

Now that the great adventure is over and I am home safe -- I'm still getting caught up on the sound part -- I have to admit Mr. Larson was right.

Mr. Larson was a great teacher and a great guy. Mr. Larson and all the wonderful teachers God, in His wisdom, brought into my life shared one thing in common – they had higher demands and expectations for me than I had for myself.

I bring this up this morning because the demands of our schoolteachers upon us help us understand the demands of the Law upon us. In the 3rd chapter of Galatians, Paul tells us that the Law was our “tutor -- literally, our teacher -- to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (3:24).” The never-ending, never-relenting, never-compromising “You shall's” and “You shall not's” of the Law have left us weary, burdened,

weighed down. So, Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

A mirror shows us how we look. The mirror of God's Law shows us how we look before God by our very natures. And that, Dear Saints of God, is not a pretty sight.

In the Law, God told us how to live our lives. We are to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We are to show our love for God by trusting in Him above all else; honoring His name; holding His Word sacred. We are to show our love for our neighbor by honoring those God has placed in authority over us, our fathers and mothers, teachers, civic leaders, and pastors. We honor life by helping and supporting our neighbor in all their physical needs. We honor marriage by loving and honoring the spouse God has given us. We honor our neighbor's possessions by helping him/her to improve and protect their possessions. We are to honor our neighbor's reputation by using our tongues to defend our neighbor, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. We honor our neighbor by helping and being of service to them in keeping the things God has entrusted to them.

But, as we read through the commandments, we are reminded again how we have failed God and our neighbor. Paul teaches us this in our Epistle,

"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. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me ... Wretched man that I am (Ro 7)!"

The Law crushes, accuses, condemns, convicts, judges us guilty, sentences us to death and damnation. The Law teaches us, "The soul who sins shall die."

The Law pronounces us guilty. The Law gives us what we call "the guilty conscience." We know we are guilty. We know we have done wrong. But, we are not always certain where to go for relief and comfort, peace and rest.

The devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh offer us rest from the guilt of sin. We foolishly believe that if only we had that new toy or neighbor has or a new spouse, there would be joy in our life. We try to ease the guilt by drowning our sorrows. We try to convince ourselves that what we have done, or said, or thought is OK because that is what everyone around us is doing. But, these do not give us rest.

Carrying the load of the guilt of our sin has leaves us tired, worn out, burdened, troubled, and afflicted. So, Jesus says to us, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden."

In our Gospel lesson for this Sunday, Jesus gives us the answer to our guilt of breaking God's Law. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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." Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone gives freedom from guilt because only Jesus can and has taken sin away.

In the temple in Jerusalem, in the Holy of Holies, was the ark of the covenant. In that ark was the 10 commandments, the Law of God, that Law that accused and condemned us for breaking them.

On that ark was a lid, a cover. It was called "the mercy seat," because once each year, the high priest would go behind the curtain into the Holy of Holies with the blood of a goat and poured that blood all over the ark. The Law was in that ark, the Law that pronounced us guilty, that Law that demanded the lifeblood of the sinner. But, the blood of another was poured out to "cover over" the guilt of our sin.

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, poured out His innocent blood all over the altar of the cross to "cover over" our sins. All of our guilt was put on Jesus. For those sins, He was condemned and punished. For those sins, Jesus was nailed to the cross and died. Jesus takes away the guilt of sin, so that none of it remains.

How true are the words of the great church father, St. Augustine, "O Lord, our souls come from Thee, and they know no rest until they rest in Thee."

By virtue of our baptism into Christ, we are one with Jesus. He lives in us and we live in Him, that we may rest in Him.

And, we remember the words of the Rev. Dr. Luther, "It is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy." The devil is our mighty, lifelong enemy. The father of all lies comes to you to cause you to feel guilt, to weigh you down, to burden you with shame and remorse, to convince you that God could never forgive such sins as you have committed.

But, we listen to the voice of Jesus and not the lies of the devil. Jesus makes the forgiveness He won for us on the cross our very own through His Word -- the spoken Word of holy absolution and the visible Word of His body and blood in the sacrament of the altar. Through these means, He forgives us and makes strong the faith He began at our baptism. Jesus gives us rest from the guilt of sin today and forever.

I mentioned my teachers who had higher expectations of me than I had for myself. No, it was not always easy, pleasant, nor enjoyable, but it was greatly to my benefit. Living life under the cross is not always easy, pleasant, nor enjoyable. But, Jesus walks with us all the way. His rod and His staff will never fail us. He works all things in our lives for our good. He shepherds us through this valley of the shadow of death to heaven, where we will rest from all of our earthly toils and struggles, forever and ever, without end. Amen.