

St Peter's Anglican Church, Bundoora
 Proper 9 – 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
 Sunday 09/07/2023

Readings: Genesis 24.34–38, 24.42–49, 24.58–67 / P's 45.10-17 / Romans 7.14–25/
 Matthew 11.15–19, 11.25–30

Sermon Theme: *Struggle and Rest*

By Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur

Sentence

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest,' says the Lord. 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart.' Matthew 11.28–29

SERMON

I must begin this sermon by defining the meaning of sin in the context of this paper. Sin is anything, thought, or action that causes separation and decay of one's sense, understanding and experience of the joy of relationship with God.

Patricia Benner is a nursing theorist, known for described the stages of learning and skill acquisition across the careers of nurses.¹ The point of Brenner's theory is that with experience (time and practice) come expertise. Many of you like me might relate to a truth in this theory based on our career experiences, however I am intrigued when I reflect on my life as a Christian. It would appear, the theory seems not to apply so well.

As time passes, I have realized more and more just how flawed I am in being like Christ. I have recognised that confession does not equate to my being perfect rather the struggle just continues, it is as if I become aware of previously unseen flaws. Whether in thought, word, or deed, I fall to sin time and time again. This realization is not necessarily a virtue in and of itself: if I am only acutely aware of my sin, I will wallow in despair and fear.

However, by recognizing the depth of our sin we can be brought to greater joy in Christ.

This appears to be Paul's understanding in Romans today where he openly and honestly wrestles with the sin that still resides in his heart and which actively opposes his new nature. The thing Paul wants to do—fully obey Christ—he is not able to wholly accomplish; at the same time, he finds himself committing the very sin he hates. This struggle with indwelling sin culminates in verse 24 where Paul cries out, "Wretched man that I am! Who can save me from this body of death?"

Perhaps you have felt like this—perhaps you often feel like this. The question is whether or not the pervasiveness of our sin causes us, like Paul, to search for a remedy.

¹ Brenner, P. *Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice* (1984).

But the immediately Pauls himself answers ‘Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!’ Paul realises that only God through Jesus Christ can save him from the relentless with sin.

From Paul’s experience and realisation, we can draw two conclusions.

First; Only by Dealing honestly with our sin can we hope to find rest and rejoicing in Christ. Paul would not be a good example of spiritual growth and discipleship had he stopped at verse 24. Yes, like Paul, we are wretched, we are sinners. Yes, we have either deliberately or ignorantly despised, ignored and spurned a holy God. But as we hear Paul, we witness something that gives us hope.

Paul trust’s the promise of Jesus. Paul knowing that Christ knows him and supports him knows that he can be truthful to himself. That he alone will not have to carry the burden.²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

In this life being saved does not equate to being out of the war, that only comes with being called home to God. For Christians who have come to a saving understanding of their guilt before God and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, the ensuing battle against remaining sin continues and can often seem overwhelming and discouraging. But to remain in a state of doubt and despair too long without looking to Christ is neither wise nor helpful. Dealing honestly with our sin will strengthen us, give us confidence to realise our confession, forgiveness and thankfulness in Christ, not perpetual hopelessness. As Jesus declares ¹⁵ Let anyone with ears listen!

Second; Our battle against sin will be life-long. Paul had been walking with Christ for several years at the time he penned these words, yet the intensity of his battle against sin had not lessened over time—it had increased.

Growing in spiritual maturity means that we will become more discontent with ourselves, not less. That is not to say that we can find and should look for areas where the Lord has given grace and growth; even Paul had the spiritual capacity to say that he was mature enough to be imitated (Philippians 3:14-17) and had been able to accomplish many things by the grace of God. (I Corinthians 15:10). But the clearer our spiritual sight becomes as we grow in faith the more acute will be our recognition of remaining sin.

That is why Paul follows Romans 7:13-25 with 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Despite the fact that we are involved in a battle against enemies whose attacks at times, seem stronger than our defences and who appear unlimited in their resources, the glorious truth is this: the victory, our victory has already been won by the death and resurrection of Jesus. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Through faith in Jesus we are strengthened against the divisive efforts of sin in this life.

As we move forward, as we face whatever challenge lays before us, let us explore ourselves asking, where have we turned from trust in Jesus? where have we through dealings with others abused the love of God for us? Where we see sin in ourself let us confess, seeking forgiveness and turning to Jesus, let us not stress but trust in his love and support knowing that in doing so we will through him know the eternal joy of the divine presence. Amen