

Sermon: Finding Rest in Jesus
5 Pentecost, Year A
Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30
(Today's sermon was interactive; therefore, the words contained in the parentheses are possible answers to the questions addressed)

Shelby Ochs Owen
Emmanuel, Staunton
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"I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

How many of you have set off with great intentions only to have failed miserably at what you were hoping to do? Can you name some of those failures that people sometimes experience? (diet, exercise, read more, quit judging/criticizing, stop watching the news, cut back on drinking, etc.)

O.k. So here is an email conversation from this past Monday between two men I know who are always feeling that they need to be better about their eating habits, trying to keep their weight down, and they are going to be meeting for breakfast soon. The names have been changed to protect the innocent:

Fred: (This week) I've stopped eating all together.

John: Since you have stopped eating all together, I'll have mine and most of yours. We can talk about inherently flawed planning; goal setting, forecasting and other flights of fancy based on good intentions but not grounded in likely outcomes.

Fred: Speak for yourself man...I happen to only be up ten pounds. Or 15. I lived on French fries and fried bananas down south for two weeks. And then, baby back ribs at Mill Street the other night with our house guest with... more fries.

And we may or may not have stopped at Split Pants. I mean (Split) Banana and not *one* scoop either.

I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

When do you try to start a new habit? (Lent, beginning of the new calendar year, etc.) For some of us we start new habits at the beginning of a new month or a new week. And if the first of the month actually falls on a Monday, oh, wow! New habits have an extra hope-filled punch to them!) But how often do those new things we set out to do take hold? Not very often. And it's easy to feel guilty about it or beat up on ourselves.

Well the Apostle Paul struggled, too. He struggled with the law. He had been trained as a lawyer after all. Most of us can identify with what he is saying: "I do not understand my own actions. For *I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate*. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good...For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand...Wretched man that I am!"

Paul is struggling! Who will rescue him from this crazy hamster wheel? (this body of death) What does he say at the end? “Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

So let’s take a look at the Gospel reading (last 4 lines): “Come unto me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What do you think Jesus means here? (As we take Christ into our being and allow God to have more and more of us, we find humility and gentleness at the core of our being.)

Why humility? What is humility? (comes from the Latin humus word, meaning of the earth, close to the ground; means not thinking you are better than other people, having an accurate concept of oneself, able to learn, able to relate to others, better able be in relationship with God, starting point for growth)

What are some things that people find particularly humbling in their lives? (loss of a job, loss of a marriage, having children, failing health, failing out of college,)

Do you notice the connection between what we find humbling is often related to what we *perceive* as failing? *I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.*

Sometimes those are the very places where growth can happen. What does God do with what we might label as “failure?” God doesn’t turn away from us in those moments, although we may turn away from God. Jesus says, Come to me! Draw near to me because I love you unconditionally – no matter what you do! Find rest for your souls in me.

Learn from me. I will transform your weariness, your failures, your disappointments, your burdens into something beautiful.

The Apostle Paul is not trying to get us to stop doing good, not trying to destroy our attempts at forming good habits! -- But to find ourselves yoked to Jesus, that we will find ourselves gentle and humble of heart.

May we all find our rest and relief in Jesus.

Amen.