Our Redeemer Lutheran Church   Pentecost 4
Quincy, IL   Saturday, June 27, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Rev. Martin R. Eden   Sunday, June 28, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

"Sin Hurts, Commandments Kill, Christ Brings Life"

Romans 7:1-13

Last week, I spoke about how you need to read the Bible in its greater context. The words of Jeremiah we heard "O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;" need to be read within the greater context of Jeremiah's ministry. Jeremiah is not accusing God of acting underhandedly toward him. He is telling God that when he was appointed by God to be His prophet that he didn't quite know the fullness of the job description. His ministry was not going to be easy. His life was going to be very uncomfortable. Sin hurts people. He would witness things and endure things that are unspeakable in mixed company. I kid you not, read Lamentations.

We turn to Paul's words to the Romans. As a Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus was very comfortable in the Law of God – or what he perceived to be the Law of God. When Christ appears to him and reveals the true nature of the Law, Paul says, "the very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. . . the commandment, 'deceived me' and through it killed me."

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This is the same reality that Jeremiah was talking about last week, "O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived." Again, Jeremiah was not accusing God of acting underhandedly toward him. He just didn't quite know the fullness of the job description.

Paul, as a Pharisee, as a keeper of the Law did not know the fullness of what that meant. He thought that his righteous life within the religious community made him right with God. But when God's Law cut him to the heart, as he says, "sin came alive and I died." The Law kills us, it divides us, it shows us how much sin hurts. The illusion is that sin doesn't hurt you or your neighbor. The reality is something very different.

The good news is Paul speaks these words to us within the context of the rest of Romans and we have already heard how we "died to sin" as we were crucified with Christ and were buried with Him in our Baptism. Our Old Adam has already died with Christ in Baptism and you have already been raised to the new life in Christ and are waiting for the final resurrection on the Last Day. As I said last week, that is your greater context. That is your reality. Christ brings life. God's Word of salvation is Good News.

Yet, God's Word divides (Scripture says even to the point of "dividing joint and marrow'). It gets to the heart of the issue. Paul says, "This is a good thing." The Law is not the problem that causes division. Sin is what divides. False teaching is what divides. That is true within our spiritual life, our personal relationships, and society in general. Sin and false teachings divide us. The Gospel, forgiveness, Baptism, the flesh and blood of Christ is what brings healing.

You will not find healing anywhere else. That is the greater context in which Paul writes these words.

This brings us to Jesus' words from Matthew's Gospel, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." This is Jesus talking. A sword – like one that divides "joints and marrow." "I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother." "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

This is not saying that you need to look at your family with diminished emotion – as if I will be a better Christian by having less concern for my parents or wife or children, and committing myself solely to the Lord. Paul says in 1 Timothy that a prerequisite for being a good pastor is being a good husband and father.

Jesus is saying that the truth which he brings will divide households. There will be people within your family who will cling to sin and false teaching, who will not receive the message of the cross and empty tomb with the same joy or understanding as you. However, if you are more concerned with what they think than what Jesus thinks, you are not worthy of Jesus. Then again, who among us is "worthy" of Jesus? That's the whole point.

Again, as Jeremiah said, "Oh Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived." This is harder than I ever imagined life in Christ to be. Or as Paul found out, his comfortable place within the kingdom of God (or what he thought was the kingdom of God) where he was before Christ revealed Himself (and showed Paul how much he must suffer for the sake of the Gospel, as Jesus said he

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would in Acts 9) – the comfort Paul had as he was raised to think that being a good person was what it was all about – he realized how much he was deceived. Through the commandments (in which Paul had taken comfort in his early years), Paul says, "sin deceived me and through [the commandments] killed me."

This gets to the heart of Jesus' words, "whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." The cross that we bear is not some hardship, illness, loss of property or anything like that. Those issues are real. However, the cross of which Jesus speaks is the emptying of our self. Jesus gets to the heart of our sinful condition. Faith has empty hands. The only thing we can hold before Him to show our worthiness is our sin. Here are my sins Jesus. Here are the things I have done. I hate them. The only hope I have is You and Your cross. I have nothing that makes me worthy – except that, in Baptism, my Old Adam was crucified with Christ; buried with Him; and we are raised to new life.

This is Paul's reality. This is our reality as baptized Christians. The commandments that I thought were saving me only pointed to my sin. Sin came alive; and I died – in Christ.

This is repentance leading to salvation. The promise of Baptism is God's promise of death leading to life. Jesus says, "Take up your cross and follow Me." Amen.