



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

July 31, 2011

7th Sunday After Pentecost

Sermon Text: [Romans 7:15-25a](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Exodus 33:12-23](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 145](#)

Second Lesson: [Romans 7:15-25a](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 11:25-30](#)

The Christian Faith, One Word at a Time: *Battling*

I think it was about two or three weeks ago now (I'm not always real good on dates) when I found myself in beautiful downtown Mishicot. It was a Sunday afternoon. In that little bowl along the highway there, way down low where no breeze hits you, and it was a nice beautifully warm and humid day, watching a baseball game, a tournament game. It was a championship game. Way-Mor was playing a team that had beat them by 10 runs earlier in the year. It was a very, very interesting game. For good reasons, and for bad reasons. The bad reasons made it to the column that's written every Sunday about sportsmanship, the next week. The coach of the team we were playing didn't like a couple of the calls the umpire made and instead of going out and talking straight to the umpire, he stayed back and yelled as loud as he could about how the calls were bad and the ump was a fool and on and on and on. He was finally warned, and he kept yelling, and the ump didn't throw him out. It got to the point where it was kind of hard and embarrassing to watch.

But it was also an interesting game for a really good reason. This team that had beat our team by 10 runs earlier in the year, we got up on them 8-0 in the first few innings of the game. That was pretty exciting. Even though there was no breeze down where the kids were playing, it was still pretty exciting. Even though it was so hot, it was still really fun to watch. They were playing as well as I've seen them play in quite awhile. They were up, and it was fun.

But slowly the other team came back. Then in one inning everything kind of fell apart as it tends to do at times in Way-Mor baseball. They scored 9 runs and I believe they were up 14-10 then. I watched the kids walk off the field after they finally got the final out. Their shoulders were slumped, their heads were down, and you're thinking to yourself, "It's a hot day. They were excited. They were up. Now they're behind. There are only a couple of innings left. They are all thinking about going home and getting in front of air conditioning and playing video games and giving their thumbs a workout now." I figured the game was over.

What I thought was really amazing is that the kids kept battling. In that inning, they scored 4 runs. They tied the game. I was shocked. I didn't expect it. They kept battling, through the heat, through all these things. Through the other coach's acting up and embarrassing everyone that was in the stadium, they kept battling and working and didn't just pack it in and say, "Awe, we'll play another day," or give into it and say "That's it. We tried hard." They ended up scoring 2 runs in the top of the seventh and then

held them and won the game by 2. They got their little trophies that I'm sure are now at home someplace gathering dust. But they battled. They didn't give up. They didn't pack it in when it would have been the easiest most natural thing in the world on a hot day just to say, "Oh well. We tried."

When you listen to the words I read to you from Romans, Paul is describing for us through the Holy Spirit this battle that goes on each and every day with each and every one of us. There is a part of us that loves God and wants to serve God. We want to, we don't have to, we want to do what is right before God because we want to thank him for his wonderful gifts of eternal life, of the gifts we enjoy in this world, and of all the things he showers on us day after day. We want to do it. But we have a sinful nature which makes us often feel like we're going through a hot humid day where it would just be easier to give into that sinful nature and quit, and just say "Oh well. God will forgive me anyhow. I'm going to do this because it's just going to be easier. I don't feel like fighting against what my sinful nature wants anymore."

You've all had times like that, haven't you? You've all faced that, humid days, cold days, and every day in between. We have this struggle going on. So how are we going to keep battling when every part of us just says to give in. "So what? God will forgive you anyhow" is what Satan is whispering in your ears. That's exactly what Paul is talking about here. The Christian who has been forgiven by God, the Christian who is in Christ and loves their Savior is always going to embrace this battle and know that it's going to go on. We aren't going to be surprised by it. We aren't going to be surprised that there's a part of me that wants to do what I know I shouldn't. It's there. God tells us about it. We know it's there. We know it's in each other too, so I suppose that's one of the reasons why God puts us together in Christian families, the family of believers, a congregation, so that we can encourage and help one another when we trip and fall.

Paul had been talking about how the Christian's relationship has changed. We've died to sin so we are no longer slaves to sin. Now we are slaves to God. We used to be married to sin is what he had said right before this, but now that we have died, we are set free from that marriage. Now we can marry another. And that other is Christ. We are the bride of Christ, the church. So now we don't just say, "I'm going to sin and God will forgive me." He's still addressing that question "What shall we say? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" No. Your whole nature has changed. Because you're whole nature has changed, what you are is what you do. You are no longer just a sinner who is only controlled by sin. Now you have the new self in you, the part of you that loves God, so now you have a battle that is going to rage every day. "The good I want to do, that I don't do." I know what I should do. I know how I should love my spouse and raise my children. I don't always do it because I'm a sinner. You know how you should act as an employee or an employer, but do you always do it? No. You're a sinner. You know the good. You know the right thing to do before God. You know it really well. It's obvious that you and I know it because when someone else does what's not good, we can see that real easily, right? We can see that crystal clear. It's a little tougher to see it inside of ourselves. That's why Paul so much personalizes this whole discussion, "The good I want to do, I don't do. The evil I don't want to do, I

keep on doing.” So I see this law at work in me as the part of me that loves God and wants to serve him doesn’t do it. It’s a personal struggle.

I’m betting each and every one of us here needs to be able to see the sin in ourselves better. We’ve got it nailed in seeing the sin in someone else. But God wants us to fight this battle inside of us as well and see where we are prone to trip. We are all going to be prone in different areas. Don’t waste time saying “My sin is not as bad as your sin.” That’s just a waste of energy. That’s a waste of time to even think about. That’s what Satan wants you to do because it takes your eyes off of Jesus. Instead, recognize your own sins and be honest with yourself. Confess those sins. Throw them on Christ. In Christ, you will find forgiveness. Then rejoin the battle renewed by Christ.

The good I want to do, that I do not do. The evil I do not want to do, I keep on doing. That continual struggle is so hard at times. So often we want to kind of be like that other team’s coach and cry and yell at God and say God’s not fair. “You’re asking too much of me. You can’t expect me to love others like I love myself. That’s unreasonable God.” At times we want to carry on and blame God instead of just seeing that it’s us. We are just like the coach on the sideline that carries on about how the ump blew the call. Instead of coaching his own team, he’s worried about something else. We just have to admit what God says is good. There’s that part of us that wants to do what God wants. That part of us knows that what God says is right and true and good. And if we were to do it, it would be a blessing for us. But the sinful nature just says, “I don’t want to.” And too often the sinful nature wins.

Then Satan comes along, when the sinful nature wins, and he goes, “You know that stuff Paul was talking about, how you died to sin?” Satan wants to tell you, “You haven’t died to sin. Look at you! You’re doing it all the time! You must not really be a child of God if you keep doing this.” Satan wants to tell you that this battle is evidence that you are not a Christian. He wants you to just throw in the towel, go home, get in front of a fan or the air conditioning and play your video game and just quit battling. That’s what Satan wants.

My guess is that from time to time you and I have done it. We’ve given up. We’ve said, “God, you’re asking too much of me. It’s too much. I’m not doing it.” Here’s the amazing thing about your God and my God... His love for us is so perfect, so complete and so absolute he continues to love us even when we thumb our nose at him like that. We say it’s too hard, too much, too tough. God still says, “In Christ I love you.” He continues to be patient with us and work with us and show us our sin so that he leads us to repentance. Then when he leads us to that repentance, when he works that change in our hearts, he wraps his arms around us and says, “My Son lived and died in your place. His perfection is yours. His blood was shed so that you won’t spend eternity in hell.” He loves you completely and absolutely. That’s why you and I keep battling. Because the one who is for us is greater than the one who is against us. The one who is against us will lie and deceive continually. The one who is for us just continues to love.

That love is powerful. That love has changed you, and it's changed me. That love enables us to keep battling. Our battling doesn't win our forgiveness. Christ won our forgiveness. Because Christ won our forgiveness, that's why we continue to battle, not to make God love us, but because his love for us is so completely perfect and absolute to begin with. That's why we want to do. And by God's grace, yes, we can get better at it, but just don't pat yourself on the back when you do get better at it. Make sure to thank God that he's alive and kicking and working in you.