

Pentecost 8, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Matthew 11: 16 – 19, Romans 7: 15 – 25

In the sermon today, we'll look first at the opening verses of the Gospel lesson, from Matthew chapter 11, before turning to St. Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 7. I invite you to breeze over both lessons now, and then perhaps to read them again sometime, during the week to come.

The Lord be with you. And let us pray:

Lord Jesus Christ, we can't, but you can. Rescue us from sin and death, and make of us the people you want us to be, both now and forever. Lord Jesus it is in your name we pray, AMEN.

You ever had one of those days, where you just get the feeling, that you really can't win? You know the feeling—where no matter what you do, and no matter how hard you try, it's just going to be wrong somehow, and you're going to end up frustrated, and a little unhappy? You know, often in my sermons, I try to give ordinary everyday examples of the kinds of things I'm talking about—this time I think I'll pass, because this time I think we can all come up with plenty of examples of our own. At home, at work, at school, those times when nothing we do seems right. Those days when no matter how hard we try, somehow somebody somewhere is going to find fault with it, and tell us we're wrong.

So it's worth noting, it seems to me, that Jesus had a day just like that in the Gospel lesson for today. Now Jesus being Jesus, it appears from the text He reacted to the situation with a little tongue in cheek humor—and not with an outburst of impatience and anger, like you and I would. So we can all stand to learn a little self-control here, from the One who after all, has endured all of life's frustrations, same as we do.

Here's what happened to Jesus—He was talking to people who had known John the Baptist personally. Now John the Baptist was a pretty strict guy—no wine, no music, often no food—John was very strict in his life of faith. And these people said, “Wow! John must have a demon.” Then along comes Jesus, who changed water to wine and fed 5000 with a single sack lunch and seemed more able to just enjoy life—and these very same people. These very same people now called Jesus a glutton, and a drunkard.

“You can’t win with you people,” Jesus said, patiently, and I think with a sort of smile on His face. “You can’t win with you people. If I fast, I have a demon. If I eat, I’m a glutton. Either way, in your eyes it’s going to be wrong! You’re going to find fault and reject the message, and you’re going to reject Me as well.”

Two brief lessons for us in this. One is, as I said, to learn from Jesus a bit of patience and a bit of humor—we all do have *those* days, we all do have *those* moments—no need to make them worse by blowing our tops. I have never once said something in anger, that I’m proud of later. Ok? I’ve never once said something in anger I’m proud of later—have you? We learn from Jesus patience, and humor, that’s #1.

Number 2, perhaps we also see how we can put Jesus into no-win situations. We want the Lord to “judge the ungodly,” but to be merciful to us. Tell me—how can He do both? Hmm? We want a return to old time values and clear standards of right and wrong, but for us and for our own families we’d like to be able to still slide by somehow. How can we have it both ways? We pray “God, thy will be done”—and that’s fine and good. But we must understand, as Luther pointed out long ago, we have to understand that what we are praying is, “God, thy will be done, in me too.” Be consistent. “Thy will be done” both there AND here. No more wanting to have your cake and eat it too. No more putting Jesus into contradictory, no-win situations, changing all the world but letting me stay the same old guy I’ve always been. Instead, Lord thy will be done—in my life now as well.

Well. I turn quickly now to Paul’s letter to the Romans, because here again the theme of a no-win situation is picked up and carried. To Paul, the classic example of a no-win situation, the classic example: Is sin. For us, sin is a no-win deal, “Look,” Paul says. “I know what is good. On some level I understand what I should be doing in life. But what I do, frankly, is just exactly the opposite.” Instead of giving I’m in to taking. Instead of you it’s more about me; and so on. “I can’t win,” Paul says. Sin has me tied up in knots. “In my inmost self I delight in the law of God,” but in the life I actually lead, I love myself more, and it’s plain that I can never really

please God. No matter how hard I try, I can't get past my own habits and my own impulses and my own sin. No matter how hard I try, I can't win with a perfect God.

So lose already. Lose already, says Paul. Surrender; give it up give it all to Him. You can't win but Jesus can. Jesus did! The way out of the no-win situation of sin and death, the way out, is to lose—lose yourself in Christ, who died for us and is risen from the dead. He forgives sinners, He overcomes death and the grave, go ahead and lose, lose yourself in Him. And then begin life anew, as His child forever.

Thanks be to God, who gives losers like us the victory. Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ; in whose name we pray, AMEN.