

"Wretched man that I am ..."

Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

July 6, 2008

A word about America on this American holiday: Only in America can a pizza get to your house faster than an ambulance. Only in America do people order double cheeseburgers, large fries and a DIET coke. Only in America do we leave cars worth thousands of dollars in the driveway and put our junk in the garage. Only in America do we use answering machines to screen calls and have call-waiting so we won't miss a call from someone we didn't want to talk to in the first place. Only in America do we buy hot dogs in packages of ten and buns in packages of eight.

I wish I could get inside your heads on Sunday mornings and hear what you think about during the sermon. {Wouldn't that be a scary thing ...??? Are you eager to listen to the pastor expound some questionable wisdom concerning the ancient texts from the Bible? Have you cleared your mind of all of the other things that are so much on your minds? Let's see ... what are you thinking ...

'I wish he would get on with it and cut that 17 minute sermon down to two minutes so I could get home to those potatoes that are cooling - potato salads don't make them self. It's holiday, for heaven's sake'

'Boy it was fun lighting those fire works last night - I can't wait for dark tonight - I bet that big \$39.00 multi - explosion candle that we saved will be great!'

'Let's see ... as soon as I get out of here I am going to get into something comfortable - go sit in the sun and get a great tan'

And the Apostle Paul weeps and cries out ... "Wretched man that I am ... Who will rescue me ..."

'I'm sure glad that mom let me go with those boys to the lake last night for the fireworks? Maybe if I am really sweet and do the dishes -- maybe she won't figure out that I am trying get out of the family picnic and sitting around with all of those relatives this after noon -- I hate it when they pinch my cheeks and tell me how they remember how cute I was when I was little ...'

"Wretched man that I am ... Who will rescue me from this body of death?" 'My life is miserable -- I keep doing the things that I don't want to do. I know what I should do -- I know what is right for me to do - I just can't do it. Wretched man that I am ...'

'Did I remember to get potato chips? What are we going to do if we don't have enough food?'

And Jesus said: "Come to 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."

'What ... did the pastor say? something about somebody who is willing to carry things -- maybe they will carry chairs -- I just know that we need more help getting set up for the picnic!'

"Wretched man that I am" "Come to me ... and I will give you rest." --- Are you listening now? I know that every person here is filled with many interests & concerns. There are many things that are exciting and cause us joy. But we are also weary from the stress and struggles of life. Often it seems as though there is no help - no solution - our lives just keep getting fouled up and over burdened. We do get weary -- and sometimes the burden is too great to bear. But what really wearies us is not the potato salad and the company preparations, it is not the tasks of moving chairs in order to celebrate the 4th. What wearies us is the result of the struggle that Paul talks about in the second lesson. What wearies us is a world filled with people just like us -- broken by sin, doing the very things that we really know that we do not want, trapped by the law of sin that is at war within us. Relationships are strained and people are touched by emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and the like. In the midst of fears and greed and world wide struggles we worry about financial concerns and future happiness. We can easily get the chairs moved - and the fireworks went off - and the meals of the day will nourish our bodies {and there will probably be leftovers}; but for the pain of the brokenness that is the sin that fills our world there seems to be no relief.

And Jesus said: "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." I don't know what you expect of the burden bearing ability of Jesus - I do know that He didn't come to move chairs. But Paul was convinced that Jesus was the one who would rescue him from the wretched condition in which he found himself. Did he expect that with the coming of Jesus there would be no more struggle as a result of sin? I don't think so. His acknowledgment of that on going struggle comes well after his conversion - and even then as he served as a traveling apostle and missionary, he continued to struggle with that war with sin. But he was able to give thanks to God even in the midst of his talk about his wretched condition.

We have again celebrated our nations Independence Day. We have hopefully remembered and celebrated the breaking free of a nation from what was an oppressing power. We celebrate the establishment of a new nation under God. Somehow all of that struggle easily gets lost in history. But as individuals we are constantly involved in a similar struggle. The law of sin continues to impose brokenness on us and every day we wake to fight the battle. But we have a

'commander and chief' on our side who knows the struggle in which we are engaged. He invites us to come with that weariness and find rest in strong arms that accept us in our brokenness. He won't make the potato salad but He will forgive our sin and renew our lives as we walk with Him.

The biggest problem is our unwillingness to accept any of what He calls us to or what He offers so freely. The little children's poem at the beginning of the Gospel text about the flute that is played but a refusal to dance and the wailing for which there was no mourning is about our unwillingness to accept either the law or the gospel. John the Baptist called for repentance and change of life - the wailing. But he was rejected and the people refused to change. Jesus came offering a new freedom and joy - the flute playing. But that too was rejected and the people refused to dance to the tune He played and the freedom He offered. We reject the notion of doing anything anyway but our own way.

"Wretched man that I am" -- Paul found and received the joy of the new life of forgiveness and new life in Christ. But will we dance? Will we find rest for our souls? Having declared our independence as a nation should we continue to fret about the restrictions imposed by the old rulers? No! The fireworks declare the joy of our freedom and life as a nation. Having been freed and welcomed into the rest offered by God - should we continue to be weighed down by the wretchedness in which we have been trapped? No! --- We join Paul in declaring "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" AMEN