

Sermon
Wretched Man?
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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church
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Wretched man? Paul uses those words to describe...himself ... in today's scripture. I think this is a habit we all have much too often – we speak poorly of ourselves to ourselves. And maybe we've been taught that we fall short so frequently – so much so that we have to start every worship with confession – that we must be unworthy on some level. And while I don't mean to disagree with scripture, I do disagree with this particular accounting from Romans.

Yes, we are all capable of evil, of doing bad things, of saying hurtful words, of leaving someone behind who needed us. But we are also capable of doing great things – of turning someone's life around with our compassion and kindness, something I see frequently here in this building and in this community. Now you might be thinking, well maybe true, but look at this community – so much need, so much to do to make things as we wish they were. Is that what you were thinking? Well, if it was, I have great news for you – inside of you is the power to change whatever it is you want to change.

In as much as Paul is devastated by his actions, or inactions – our ability to recover from moments like this and more than recover, but transform, is astounding. You see, inside each one of us is something much bigger than evil, much more significant than any sin we could ever commit in our lifetime...because inside each one of us is God. God the creator, the sustainer, the liberator – God lives in me and God lives in you. You see, the truth is, you don't actually need me...Well, I'd like to think that you come because you like me and maybe what I

have to say is somewhat interesting – but you don't need me to understand God because you are, as I am, capable of feeling that presence at any moment.

Whatever we wish can be. It may not be as you see it today but it can be if we envision it, if we work together toward it. What is your true superpower? How is all that possible from little old us? I'll get to that.

Our Old Testament scripture from Genesis is a semi-continuous reading from the last couple of weeks. Now we find Isaac is a young man and he is in need of a wife. So Abraham instructs his servant to go to the town where he was born and find the exact right woman for his son. A pretty tall task. We have all been faced at one time or another with these moments in life where we have to make a decision – one that we know will change the course of our lives...and for this man, now was that time. It's hard to make decisions that will affect us, much less one like this that will affect these two people and these two families. And for him, as a servant, he's been asked to do this not as a friend but as an employee of sorts. Now that is pressure. So he leans upon his faith and he asks God to help him recognize the right woman. As we often see in the Bible, this moment of choice, of providence, of change, happens at the well, the spring of life – life giving-water – where the town comes to obtain their sustenance. Where this servant goes to gain his. And his eyes lay upon Rebekah.

Yes, Rebekah is being chosen for a man she has never met nor knows...not even from the same region. At that time, women were chosen for marriage or for a harem if that was the desire. But here something interesting happens – Rebekah's family asks her if she wants to go and marry Isaac, this stranger, and she agrees. We don't know why – it doesn't say what compels her, but perhaps she too felt the presence of the angel of God and knew that what she was being

chosen for was what we all seek in this life and the only thing that ever truly matters...she was being chosen for love. To love and to be loved by another. To start a family – a new union that would lead to more and more and more love...and here indeed we are. Our great, great, great, great...well, you get it...our grandmother, several times removed.

So what's different between Paul's energy and Rebekah? When you heard these passages read, which gave you energy and which drained you of it? When we focus on and gravitate toward those feelings of self-loathing – when we blame ourselves for not following “the rules”, it draws us away from God's energy that lives in each of us. But when we walk toward love and we move within love, our lives become full and balanced. In that energy, God is revealed and then we are capable of doing great things.

So what do you wish for? For yourself? For your family? Like the servant, do you go out into the world, believing you will be led to the answer? Led to the path that will lead to fulfillment of your vision? It takes tremendous courage to do what the servant did. He may have been rejected by Rebekah's family, Isaac or his family may have disapproved of the choice. If he had Paul's discouraging attitude, would he have been able to convince Rebekah and her family to allow her to come with him? “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.” We all feel discouraged, hold onto anger much longer than we should, feel superior, frustrated – but luckily for Paul and for us, our God is a patient God and will wait for us to return to the love. Paul continues in Chapter 8... *the Spirit of our Lord and of his resurrection bears witness that we are children of God (8:15-17) and intercedes for us when we do not know how to pray (8:26f.), so that finally we*

are assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (8:39).

Do you take time for self-reflection so you can understand what compels you? When we come humbly we can release ourselves from the ties that bind us in that type of energy...it can lead to forgiveness of ourselves or others, a letting go of hate and an openness to understanding, and an opportunity know just who this wonderful child of God is and where your love truly exists.

Our faith is a journey – there are many paths that lead us to God. If you are feeling caught up on that path of questioning and unworthiness, this moment God is calling you back to God's love for you. Embrace it! Celebrate it! Believe in this good news! You are a work in progress and there will be no test in the end. You are naturally made to gravitate toward love. And because you love, you will live in joy.

Amen