

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

GETTING OVER OURSELVES

Romans 7:15-25a

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Chris Repp

15I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. 17But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. 19For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. 20Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. 22For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, 23but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? 25Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Author's Note: There is very little here to feed the prognosis side of the matrix, so I have gone to chapter 8 for that, especially 8:10: "... if Christ is in you ... the Spirit is life because of righteousness."

DIAGNOSIS: Me, Me, Me!

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Doing Evil in Spite of Myself

I see that things are not right in the world. I also see that I am part of the problem. But I don't want to be part of the problem. I want to be part of the solution. So I try to be the change I want to see in the world, on my good days at least. But it's not working! I'm still a polluter. I'm still benefitting from cheap labor. I persist in aiding and abetting injustice in a system rigged in favor of people like me. The public evil I participate in is only easy to admit because I'm in good company—you do it too.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Delighting in the Law (and Our Own Goodness)

But it's so frustrating, because I know that I should be able to do better. I should be able to fix this mess we're in, especially if you help me. We're good Christians, you and I. We love the Lord. We memorized the Ten Commandments in Confirmation class, and we even agree with them (except maybe the "keep the Sabbath day holy" one.) We know that God's law is good and just. We do our best to be good, upstanding citizens, and we teach our children our values. Maybe if everyone would be more like us, the world would be the better place we know it can be.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Lost in Death

The real disappointment is finding out that this is a false hope. That life raft doesn't float. The law of God, which was only ever a penultimate solution to our problem, has been fatally weakened by our sinful flesh (8:3), I've been thinking it was all about me, both the problem and the solution, but all I'm left with is a "body of death." Wretched indeed!

PROGNOSIS: Christ in Me

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Rescued for Life

Into our death-bound, sinful flesh comes the only real solution to our problem. Jesus Christ the rescuer takes on our nature and

our lot in order to deal with sin, succumbing to the deadly consequences of our sin-bound flesh in order free us from our impossible predicament. (Again, 8:3) He does what the law was never going to be able to do, reconciles us with God and through the gift of the same Spirit that raised him from the dead (8:11), he gives us the life that God intended from the very beginning (8:10).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Relying on God's Mercy

By the power of that Spirit dwelling within and among us, we cling now in faith to the promise of God's mercy toward us in Jesus Christ, delighting no longer in our own goodness but in God's alone. The world will be a better place only because God has promised that it will be. When everyone trusts that promise the world will be the better place that we hope for.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Doing Good in Spite of Ourselves

That trust, animated and sustained by the Holy Spirit, leads to all kinds of good. In all humility, out of gratitude toward God and concern for the neighbor, we begin to take concrete steps in the direction of environmental and social justice. And more than justice: love that is our faith in action. We don't understand these actions either, we just do the good that God wants—and we want too—because God is at work in us. We can't help it! Thanks be to God.