

(PP1) Romans 7:15-25a

“The Apostle Paul takes a Selfie”

Most folks know what a “selfie” is, right? A selfie is a picture you take of yourself with your smartphone – usually for the purpose of sharing it on social media. And, it’s not just something young teen-agers are doing – even President Obama has been caught snapping a few.

Selfies have become a regular part of most people’s everyday existence. Slow day at work? Just snap a quick picture and show the world how cool you are, even when numbed by the boredom of sitting in your cubicle.

Trying on a new pair of sunglasses? Take some shots of yourself rocking a few different pairs, and get some instant feedback from your friends. Just have an amazing meal? Enjoying the game from some great seats? Don’t just take pictures of the food, or the field – No! Snap a selfie and show the world what they’d be enjoying if they were along for the ride!

(PP2) In our Scripture lesson this morning, the Apostle Paul has taken a “self-portrait,” and shared it with the world. But, like so many selfies, what he shares isn’t all that pretty. It’s a snapshot in papyrus and ink that is raw, unfiltered, and unflattering. It’s as if Paul is looking at himself and saying, “Dude. I’m a mess.”

Paul writes, “I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.” (v. 19) Paul’s snapshot reveals a man who feels pulled between two forces at work within his heart and mind. Paul knows that he is “in Christ,” and as such, he is a new creation, no longer defined by that which is corrupt in him.

And yet, deeply rooted within himself, remains the power of sin. It remains at residence in his flesh and bones, rearing its ugly head, and drawing him away from the new path on which God has placed him.

Keep in mind that Paul is no “newbie” to the Christian faith. At this point, he has been following Jesus for about 25 years. Paul’s selfie reveals that he is at one and the same time - a saint and sinner. He is righteous in the eyes of God because of Christ, yet broken to the core because of his sin.

There is a Native American tale, well-known and often told, that reminds us of this truth. A Cherokee grandfather once said to his grandson, “There is a battle between two wolves inside all of us. One is evil – full of anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego. The other is good – full of joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth.”

After thinking about what his grandfather had said for some time, the boy asks, “Grandfather, which wolf wins?” And the grandfather replies, “The one you feed.” I am sure Paul would agree.

(PP3) The honesty of Paul’s self-portrait is jarring, isn’t it? Whenever we take a picture of ourselves, we have to admit that we want it to be as flattering as possible. How many of you have ever asked someone to re-take an impromptu photo because you felt it didn’t catch you looking “just right.”

Cameras today allow for an infinite number of “do-overs.” They come with a treasure trove of editing options – from cropping, to filters, to retouching – all in the palm of our hands. This allows us to pose, posture, and present a particular “self” to the rest of the world. If we want to appear to be the “life of the party,” we can, and no one will ever see anything else – at least not on social media.

(PP4) But Paul knew that there is power in the “unfiltered” assessment of one’s life. There is power for the follower of Jesus who sees himself, or herself as they really are. The power, of course, is that the more honestly we assess ourselves, admitting our deep, continuing brokenness, then the more heroic, the more grace-filled and generous Jesus begins to look. We cannot understand the true heights of God’s love until we come to grasp the radical depths of our own sin.

Paul knew this. Paul knew that by staring at his unflattering selfie, he was less likely to be fooled by the “facade of awesomeness” that he, and every other human, so often present to the rest of the world. By looking at himself honestly – even after years of following Jesus – the more beautiful and necessary the love of God in Christ became in Paul’s life.

You might remember Paul’s words in 2 Corinthians 12. He confessed, “To keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me, and keep me from becoming proud. Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in your weaknesses.

“So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

In writing this to the church at Rome, Paul knew that his own transparency would be good for God’s people. Paul wanted to try to show the church of Rome how to acknowledge one’s problems, and at the same time, how to overcome them. He writes, “Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin

and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.” (vv. 24-25) **PAUSE**

(PP5) So, when is a selfie appropriate? Enjoying a good time with friends? Sure, take a selfie. Attending a funeral? Probably not a good idea. Just ask President Obama about the flak he received – not just from the press, but from First Lady, Michelle – when he snapped a selfie with Denmark’s Prime Minister during Nelson Mandela’s memorial service.

But, what if there is power in sharing a few, unflattering “selfies” of your own? What if showing your crow’s-feet, your wrinkles and spiritual “bad-hair days” can be a powerful way to help others more fully appreciate Jesus?

As a pastor, I have had many opportunities to encourage another believer when they are suffering from the effects of sin in their lives because I too have suffered the consequences of sin, and had to admit my dependence upon Christ to overcome them and move on.

Paul gets real and honest about himself in chapter 7 so that the words that kick off chapter 8 are what they are meant to be – unbelievably generous and comforting. “So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.”

Think about this. No matter how unflattering our picture may be on any given day, no matter how strong the forces are that try to pull us off the path of righteousness, God refuses to reject us. *Go ahead and show God your worst selfie!* God promises that, for those who have been covered in the goodness of Jesus, and who have been injected with the power of his Holy Spirit, there will be no words of condemnation at the judgment!

At times, you may disgust yourself. I know I do! But God, on account of Christ, will not delete your picture from his family album. Because of Christ, God continues to call us daughters and sons. You know, if Jesus had taken a selfie on the cross, as raw and unfiltered, and unflattering as that image would have been, it would have personally and publicly shown the truth that God loves us so much he gave his own life to save us.

Perhaps worship is not the best place to take a selfie, but maybe we need to make an exception. Because of what God has done for each of us through Jesus our Savior, perhaps we need to take a “church selfie” and boldly post it with the phrase, “What you see is what I am, and what I am is loved by Jesus.” Are you up for it? I think the Apostle Paul would be.

May God bless you all, Amen.

Sermon Notes

Romans 7:15-25a

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- A selfie is a picture you take of yourself with your smartphone – usually for the purpose of sharing it on social media. In our Scripture lesson this morning, the Apostle Paul has taken a self-portrait, and shared it with the world. But, like so many selfies, what he shares isn't all that pretty.
- Paul writes, “I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.” (v. 19) Paul's snapshot reveals a man who feels pulled between two forces at work within his heart and mind.
- Paul's selfie reveals that he is at one and the same time - a saint and sinner. He is righteous in the eyes of God because of Christ, yet broken to the core because of his sin.
- Paul knew that there is power in the “unfiltered” assessment of life. We cannot understand the true heights of God's love until we come to grasp the radical depths of our own sin. By looking at himself honestly – even after years of following Jesus – the more beautiful and necessary the love of God in Christ became in Paul's life.
- When is a selfie appropriate? There is power in sharing a few, unflattering “selfies” of your own. Showing your crow's-feet, wrinkles and spiritual “bad-hair days” can be a powerful way to help others more fully appreciate Jesus!
- *Go ahead and show God your worst selfie!* God promises that, for those who have been covered in the goodness of Jesus, and who have been injected with the power of his Holy Spirit, there will be no words of condemnation at the judgment! At times, you may disgust yourself, but God, on account of Christ, will not delete your picture from his family album.
- If Jesus had taken a selfie on the cross, as raw and unfiltered, and unflattering as that image would have been, it would have personally and publicly shown the truth that God loves us so much he gave his own life to save us.
- Because of what God has done for each of us through Jesus our Savior, perhaps we need to take a “church selfie” and boldly post it with the phrase, “What you see is what I am, and what I am is loved by Jesus.” Are you up for it?

May God bless you!

Reach Opening Prayer – July 6, 2014

O God, we still our hearts. We do not know what words you will speak to us today, but we open ourselves to receive your truth. We want to see you, to know you more, to receive your love and to respond in worship. Our songs, our words, and our actions are for you and you alone. Guide us, Holy Spirit, as we worship today. Change us because we have been in your presence. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Litanies General

[see more ...](#)

Call: You are great, you are mighty, you are holy.

Response: To the only God be glory.

Call: You proclaim truth and justice and light.

Response: To the only God be glory.

Call: Your name is above all other names.

Response: To the only God be glory.

Call: Your holiness is beyond our understanding.

Response: To the only God be glory.

All: All glory be to you, our God, now and forevermore.

Prayers of Confession General

[see more ...](#)

Oh God, when we take the time to truly examine our hearts, we find that we can relate to Paul in so many ways. We don't do the things we want to do, and the things we don't want to do are exactly the things we do. We can feel trapped by temptation and sin. Yet, the truth is that we belong to you. You have defeated sin. You have given us power over these struggles if we will only run to you. Forgive us for trying to fight temptation on our own, for we fail every time. Help us to set our minds on you and to come to you whenever our desires try to persuade us away from living like your son. Thank you for your unending grace and mercy. Amen.

Music Links

Hymns

Take My Life and Let It Be

I Surrender All

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross