

"Woe or Whoa"

Text: Romans 8:1-11

Grace be yours and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Does everyone here agree that we find ourselves in difficult times? War, abortion, pornography, human trafficking, an escalating drug epidemic, rampant government corruption as our national leaders appear to be much more concerned about their own well-being than that of our cherished Republic, spiraling debt, a collapsing healthcare system – the list goes on and on. And all of this against the backdrop of our collective national morality, which seems to be growing ever more perverse.

And yet life for a child of God could not possibly hold greater promise or a brighter future.

It doesn't always feel that way, does it? Problems here in this vale of tears give the impression that they are piling up from time to time – to the point that it even becomes difficult to keep a future as bright as ours in sight and in focus. We plod through the days as if we are losing, when in fact in Jesus Christ we have already won.

Our emotions do that to us. We hear the alarm in the voices of those who do not recognize that our Creator-God is absolutely in control of all things, and their pessimism and fear are contagious. We then allow temporal frustrations, failures, and setbacks to tarnish all that is good in our lives. What is even more surprising is that we allow the here and now to actually dull the crystalline promises of the hereafter. Our magnificent text for this morning will simply not allow such silliness to stand, will not tolerate pessimism or gloom in the face of such a glorious and promising future, secured for us by our Savior-God.

The text that will, by the working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, realign, reenergize, and reassure us this morning is found in the 8th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

ESV Romans 8:1-11 *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending*

his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ ¶ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So far the holy, inspired words of our text. We humbly acknowledge that these are not the words of mortal men, but the words of our Creator-God, whose desire it is to strengthen and comfort us through the study of these sacred words. That such gifts would indeed be ours, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Assuming you are familiar with that timeless classic, who was your favorite character on *The Andy Griffith Show*? If, by the way, anyone here says "Otis," please see me in the office after the service.

The point with asking the question is that I can't imagine anyone who would pick *Barney Fife* – for a wide variety of reasons. No one wants to be a bi-polar, neurotic, woe-is-me Barney. Yet which character does our day-to-day outlook most resemble? Ol' Barn was forever convinced that "*the whole world is goin' to 'the bad place' in a hand basket*" – which is pretty much the attitude Christians will adopt if we focus always and only on the negative. Andy, on the other hand, would have met such pessimism with either a "*How ya figure, Barn?*" or "*Now wait just a cotton-pickin' minute.*"

So which is it for you, woe or whoa? Are things really as bad as they seem? Of course they are, and of course they're not – not if they appear hopeless in your eyes. Does our nation have moral, financial, and societal issues? Obviously, but when has that *not* been true? The

fact remains that, even on a secular level, we are blessed to live in a land of tremendous freedom and opportunity. We continually enjoy a standard of living that is beyond the wildest dreams of our ancestors. As Christians we – *in particular* – need to stop and count our blessings.

Old Timers who have "been there, done that" will usually be the first to tell you that the problem is not so much reality as it is our dismal, dispirited perception of reality. You've probably all seen it before in others – or maybe in the mirror. For the most part our lives are filled only with "first world" woe and hardship. Can you imagine how God must react when he showers us with the fantastic news of sins forgiven and the gift of eternal life, when he offers us his Son's very body and blood – first on the cross and then in Holy Communion – and when he lavishes comfort, peace, and spiritual strength upon us, day by day and week after week, only to be rewarded with "*Woe is me!*" I would not, of course, presume to speak for God, but it wouldn't be hard to imagine his reaction as: "*Just what exactly would it take for you to recognize my love for you, and therefore the promise that the future most certainly holds?*"

What then do you think is the problem? How or why could it ever be that we hear words like the first verse of our text ("***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***") and still somehow harbor feelings of gloom and pessimism? Dig a bit into our text and we'll find our answers.

In our text we read the following: "***For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.***" If you and I are routinely filled with gloom and pessimism, maybe it's because we are doing exactly what the Godless do: "***setting our minds on the things of the flesh.***" That means being too preoccupied with stuff. Stuff that doesn't really matter. Earthly stuff. Worse than that, it probably means that we are trying to fix a world that God's Word assures us is irreparably broken. If, in other words, we are expecting what our God has never promised, or what he told us *not* to expect, we will most certainly be not only disappointed but continually demoralized. The natural and tragic result is that that disappointment will overshadow and dull the eternally sublime promises that our God *has* made to us.

Have you ever been gently forced by someone – say your spouse or some other friend – to go shopping in a store that holds zero interest to you? The problem with walking into the storehouse of God's Word and finding nothing that interests or excites us has nothing to do with what God is offering, does it? That only happens when we are in the market for all the

wrong things. If you and I ever get the feeling that we just aren't getting what we wanted out of church or Bible study, it's time to check the shopping list to see if we have become focused on – preoccupied with – what our text describes as "***the things of the flesh.***"

This is not just a minor issue, is it? Our text goes on to describe the basic problem: "***For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.***" Far from frivolous, our text tells us plainly that this is a most serious spiritual condition.

Does that then mean that if I regularly drift off during most or all of the sermon, or if I find myself generally disinterested during a worship service or Bible study, I am really *an enemy of God*? Not necessarily, but it does mean that you have identified a very real and present danger in your life. It means your goals and priorities probably need attention.

Our text for this morning is just the ticket. Following up on that golden declaration ("***There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus***") we are told not just of the dangers of being earthly-minded, but of the incredible story behind God's declaration that you and I no longer live under any sort of condemnation. In our text we read, "***For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.***"

Far from irrelevant, these words teach us things that we could never know on our own; things that we could never have guessed to be true but which we nonetheless *had to know* if we were to escape hell and inherit heaven. It is in fact the height of relevance to learn that my *natural* inclinations concerning how one gets to heaven are all wrong. There is in fact nothing more important in life than to learn, or to be reminded, that the ticket for my admission to heaven cannot be earned by anything that I could ever do or say. That's what our text describes as "***the law of sin and death.***" According to our text, God the Father "***sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh***" (that's Christmas) and opened the doors of heaven for all sinners by punishing his Son in

our place (that's Good Friday.) In other words, what we could never accomplish because our sins had destroyed God's law-based plan, God did for us with his grace-based plan. We couldn't *earn* heaven, so God decided that his Son would earn it for us. He also then decided that he would give his Son's perfection to us free of charge. Free for us, that is. Jesus paid dearly.

These are things we could never know on our own, but these are the sorts of things that we are taught (or of which we are reminded) on virtually every page of God's Word – and at every worship service and Bible class based on that Word. The inevitable result of connecting daily with that Word of God is that not only is faith created and strengthened, our spirits are lifted, our life's work is clarified, our priorities are reset, and our resolve is strengthened.

No one really needs to tell you that the world drains and demoralizes. The news is always bad and the outlook is never good. Spend time on secular news channels and you will invariably be left with woe. Spend time in God's Word, however, and you will invariably be left with *whoa!* To the world, everything is spinning wildly out of control. In God's Word we find different news – the *Good News* that the same God who loved us enough to send his Son is still in control, still sees all and knows all and for whom nothing is impossible. There we learn of a God who cannot be fooled or outmaneuvered, for he sees the end of all things as clearly as the past and present. There we meet with a God who says to us, "*Stop. Take a deep breath. I've got this. I'm in control. I know where all this is going, and your future is infinitely better and brighter than you could ever now imagine.*"

God help us to learn to look not at what we lack, nor at what bad things *might* happen sometime in the future, nor to be demoralized by the evil that surrounds us. We pray rather that he would grant us the grace and wisdom both to recognize and to thank our him for the blessings of the past and to trust him to care for us equally well in the days to come – reminding us always of the incredible things he has in store for us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Ezekiel 37:1-14** The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry

bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD." ⁷ ¶ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ ¶ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD."

^{ESV} **John 11:17-27** Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

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The Fifth Sunday in Lent – April 2, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 18 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord We Come Before Thee Now"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Ezekiel 37:1-14) How picturesque and memorable is this account from the Prophet Ezekiel. The Lord here teaches us that *physical* life (which comes from God) is not the same as *spiritual* life (which also comes from God alone). It is God alone who can grant life of any kind to mankind. He is the Lord of Life – both physical and spiritual, and we are to entrust both to him on a daily basis. We are also hereby reminded of just how hollow and pointless is physical life that is devoid of spiritual life.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 38 (Page 39)

The New Testament Lesson: (John 11:17-27) Our New Testament lesson contains one of the earliest and best testimonies concerning the true identity of Jesus Christ. Martha correctly here labels Jesus as the Promised Savior. What is more, we are also here given clear testimony concerning the physical life that will be breathed back into these mortal bodies at the Resurrection of the dead. How we ought to long for that great day, working tirelessly until it arrives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 35 (Red Hymnal)

"Songs of Praise the Angels Sang"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 8:1-11 (Printed on the back page)

"**Woe or Whoa**"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

The Offering

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn – 798 (Stanzas 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"God, We Praise You"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (40) Ave (44) Wednesday (20)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Wednesday	-5:30 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council meeting

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Pastor David Schaller is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Gethsemane Lutheran, Spokane Valley WA, has called Claire Abbas to serve as a second full-time teacher in its elementary school. Grace Lutheran, Sleepy Eye MN, has called Paul Tiefel III, Messiah Lutheran, Eau Claire WI, as teacher and principal for its new school. Three men are scheduled to graduate from Immanuel Lutheran Seminary this spring. To date, three congregations have requested a graduate to fill their vacancy: Lemmon, St Louis, and Grand Rapids. The Call Committee on Graduates is scheduled to meet on April 26.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet during the fellowship hour next Sunday.

Holy Week – Next Sunday is Palm Sunday, which marks the beginning of Holy Week. During Holy Week we again plan to celebrate the Lord's Supper during a 7pm Maundy Thursday service, followed by our Good Friday commemoration on Friday, April 14. Please note that Holy Communion will be offered next Sunday, and then again on Maundy Thursday, but not on Sunday, April 23.

Confirmation – Students and parents please note the 5:30p start time this Wednesday.