

*Based on Romans 7:15-25. Paul Admits His Shortcomings*

Poor Paul. He really does want to *get it right*.

The Apostle Paul we meet throughout the New Testament and especially here in Romans is the consummate perfectionist, dotting all of his “i”s and crossing all of his “t”s and quite certain that he *is*, in fact, *right*, whether he is persecuting those who follow Jesus with all of his might at the beginning of his career or becoming the most recognizable - and prolific - follower of all at the end of his career.

Talk about an over-achiever! The Apostle Paul has a work ethic and a determination through thick and thin to put us all to shame. Which, according to Brené Brown - who studies shame for a living - is exactly the point. The Apostle Paul is driven by shame, as witnessed in our Lesson today.

*I'm a mess!* Paul admits in this very public prayer smack dab in the middle of his Letter to the Romans. *Everything I do is wrong*, he laments, *even when I think I am doing it right!* It's like America Ferrara in the *Barbie* movie this summer ranting about how impossible it is to be a woman. Which, may I suggest, is also about how impossible it is to be *human*.

*I can't even follow the script when it is all laid out for me*, Paul admits. *Even when I want to, I just cannot do it*, Paul says. *And let's not even go there with all of the things I don't want to do that I end up doing anyway*, Paul says. *You would think that I would have figured it out by now*, we can imagine him saying. *In my thirties, forties, fifties, sixties* (shall I go on?). *I have not*.

*I'm a mess*, Paul admits. *And my guess is you are, too*. (Guilty as charged.) *The only hope for us is grace. Pure and simple*.

Grace, ah, there we go, that amazing gift, so hard to define, but so clear when it finally envelops us, strengthens us, encourages us, forgives us, allowing us to forgive ourselves for whatever we have done or left undone or had done to us. Grace, ah, there we go, that amazing gift, even when we do not think we need it.

It is a spiritual fact, I have come to understand, that those of us who are generally good people - generally successful, generally gifted in the ways our culture deems worthy of recognition - by and large have the biggest struggle with grace. Those of us who are generally good people, generally do the right thing, generally pay our taxes - on time, no less! - work hard, expect a quid pro quo in return, we just have very little practice with admitting we need divine help *and then receiving it!*

It is so hard for us to get it. This pure gift of healing/love/peace/forgiveness/hope/fresh start/may I even say *resurrection* that is simply HERE, no questions asked, just here.

So let's experience it. Imagine in your mind's eye one small thing you have done or left undone or that has been done to you that you blame yourself for even if it isn't really your fault. Look upon that thing as a parent would

look upon a child. Furious, perhaps, of course. But also with a deep, abiding love that finally accepts *this is just how children are. And I love my child.* Surround this thing with the light of that love.

And if you can, then widen that light to include anyone or any thing that has also been harmed by the thing you have done or left undone or has been done to you that you blame yourself for even if it isn't really your fault. Hold the hurt with compassion. Offer the hope of healing for all that suffers.

And if you can, then widen that light to include all of creation, simply being creation in all of our created-ness. Notice the divine imprint upon it all. And, if you can, release the thing you have done or left undone or the has been done to you into the compassion heart of God, and let it go.