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Text: Romans 7:14-25a

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Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Picture perfect moment. We see throughout culture this quest for the picture-perfect moment. It's the moment that you want to capture forever on film. This moment that you'll show people with a smile on your face and explain why it was so perfect, and talk about the back story to the picture. With the age of technology growing and picking up speed, we can snap pictures of moments whenever we want to with the use of smart phones. You see something, you grab your phone to capture that moment. Throughout life, people take these pictures of moments that people are living. These moments may be picture-perfect, but at other times the film reveals a very different perspective. As you walk through the checkout line at the store, you will see pictures revealing the not-so-perfect moments that celebrities experience in their everyday lives.

Society looks to Christianity and states that Christians should be picture-perfect all the time. Have you heard this from people, particularly people outside the church, that Christians are hypocrites because we don't follow what we should be doing? It sounds as though the world looking at the church expects to see perfect people, living perfect lives, always ready for a picture-perfect photo opportunity. Not to burst their bubble, but the world will not find the perfect people it thinks it will find.

Not long before the passage for today, do we hear about Paul talking about living in the Spirit. Romans 7: 5-6 states- "For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. But now we are released from

the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

We should be able to live as God would want us, too shouldn't we? Ideally as children of God we should be able to go through the rest of our lives and not have to deal with the damaging effect sin has on the world around us, shouldn't we? But, as it turns out, as God's redeemed children, we still live in a sin-filled world. We still live in a world that is filled with sin to the point we ourselves are adding to the mess of sin around us.

How is it that we are to live as salt and light in the world as Jesus calls us? We know that we are forgiven, but that doesn't make our path any easier in life. We will be faced with the same decisions and struggles that St. Paul is writing about in our Romans reading.

We see in Paul's letter to the Romans that there is a tug of war, a battle within each one of us that is pulled between doing what is right in God's eyes, and indulging in our sinful selves. But this battle isn't as simple as we think it is.

Picture in your mind's eye, a tug of war scene. You are at the front of the line pulling on your side. You are wearing your best clothes you have. Perhaps you rented the outfit and it would cost double the price if you wreck it. So far you look picture perfect. Between you is a muddy murky pit. If you fall in, there is no way to salvage that outfit, not even the dry cleaners can do it. You would have to burn it. You are pulling with all your might as your feet slip closer and closer to the pit of mud. You do your best to avoid getting into the mud. But then you remember how much you enjoyed playing in the mud when you were younger. It was so much fun. You know how much you loved it and for a split-second thought about just giving up and jumping into the mud. Then you get your wits about you and hold on with all your might. Until

eventually you finally give in. You go flying into the mud and slush. As you hit the mud, you regret everything. The dollar signs start popping up in your head of what this choice will cost you. The not-so-perfect picture is taken of you doing what you do not want to do. The good you wanted to do, you did not do, but the evil you did not want to do, you did.

As Christians we are not perfect people. We are forgiven and go out and do our best to keep God's law but we will fail no matter what. We strive to live those picture-perfect moments all the time. To follow God's law that we desire in. We attempt to avoid those sins that Satan wants us to fall into. But then we fall into that temptation. We sin, we break God's law and a not-so-perfect picture is taken of us and it is plastered across our conscience, reminding us of what we have done.

We may go out with the intention of loving our neighbor as ourselves but then fail. Thinking that the next person I see in need I will help. But when faced with the situation, we turn the other way. We say that we want to help but when the helpless person comes, we don't even look at them. We don't even look them in the eye to see the pain that they are experiencing in their life.

Perhaps the thing that you are trying to work on is being more patient with family members. Before interacting with them you tell yourself, I will be patient and loving and caring because that is what Christ wants me to do. But then a tense situation arises. You lose your patience, you lose your loving and caring attitude.

We ourselves are still sinners and saints at the same time. In the Latin: *Simul Justus et Peccator*. At the same time righteous and a sinner. We constantly live within the realm of

having good pictures taken of us as we delight in doing God's Law, and bad pictures, convicting pictures taken of us that show our sin. But thanks be to God we have another picture to see.

We see a picture, not of ourselves, but of Christ on the cross. Christ bearing the punishment that our not-so-perfect, sinful lives deserve. Christ paid for those sins on the cross. Not only do we see Christ lifted on the cross, but the empty tomb on Easter. Christ rose from the dead. There was no picture to be taken of his body there, for he had risen for you and for me.. Here is where we find the answer to Paul's question, "Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?" Jesus Christ it is! Christ Jesus is our rescuer. "Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Christ risen from the dead. That is a picture-perfect moment if you ask me. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21