

Pentecost 5 – July 9, 2017

Text: Romans 7:14-25a

Theme: Just a Rat in a Cage

**Some of you may not be up on your Grunge Rock history. While many of you stuck your fingers in your ears during the 1990's and bemoaned the end of culture, not everything was bad. Having spent about half my life in Seattle, the home of Grunge, I learned that while these new, millennial musicians were not saying it in ways or words that were culturally normative, they did, nevertheless, have something pretty important to say. Then, as Seattle was becoming the great Nirvana of music, a strange group arose out of, of all places, Chicago. They were not quite Grunge. But they were definitely not Punk. They were an alternative to everything that was popular at the time and The Smashing Pumpkins were in the forefront of what would be called Alternative Rock.**

**Like their predecessors from the late 1960's and early 1970's, the Pumpkins came to us with a social message and not just adolescent angst. One of their hits had a line in it that reflected what so many of that generation believe. They saw in their parents as people financially chained to a job they hated and emotionally bound by societal norms that didn't make sense to them. The line was "Despite all my rage, I am still just a rat in a cage."**

**That lyric from the Smashing Pumpkins in 1995 also pretty well sums up St. Paul's words from Romans today.**

**"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

**Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.” In other words, no matter how hard we try, we fail.**

**The music video for the Smashing Pumpkins song, which was called “Bullet with Butterfly Wings,” was a video of a heinous prison work camp in some third world country where the prisoners were trying to climb up out of a pit and were being shot back down with fire hoses. No matter how hard they climbed, as they neared the top, the hose would be turned on them and they would tumble back into the pit. To the youth of the 1990’s, that is often what life and particularly religion, felt like. They did not understand the systems to which their parents subscribed, and many felt as though the Boomers, who had supposedly dropped out of society, had in fact sold out.**

**Now this generation that would be called the millennials, the generation that also spawned the angry rapper, Eminem, felt like a rat in a cage and despite all of their raging about the system, they seemingly could change nothing, because like their parents before them, they had to learn that you cannot change a system from outside of it. You have to be part of the system. I say all of that to say this. That is exactly what Christianity feels like to many unbelievers and really, to many peripheral believers as well.**

**Our religion, looking in from outside, seems full of rules and expectations that we can never master. If one believes that to have faith is to master the rules, to keep all the laws, then sooner or later he will feel like that proverbial rat in a cage. He will rage because he quickly understand that he is in an untenable position in an unwinnable battle.**

**There was actually an experiment done by psychologists in 1970 that may have led to this song. They electrified part of the floor of a rat cage. The rats learned how to jump from one part of the cage to another without being shocked. Slowly the experimenters increased the portions of the floor that were electrified. The rats were shocked more and more as their options diminished. Soon the entire floor was electrified and the rats just gave up. They just laid there and got shocked. They didn't care anymore because they were helpless and hopeless. Then the experimenters slowly reduced the areas that were electrified until there was no area that would shock the rats, but the rats had given up. They still just laid there. They remained hopeless.**

**People can become like those rats. They get shock after shock as they jump from place to place trying not to sin, getting caught in situations where there is no good choice, lying to themselves to avoid feeling sinful and trying to justify whatever they did wrong. But you have to finish Paul's speech. He doesn't stop with sin dwelling in him.**

**"Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus delivers us. Jesus says,**

**"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

**We are not helpless rats in the cage. Yes, we wear the yoke, but it is the yoke of Christ and his yoke is easy and the burden is light because he has**

**already paid the price for the sin we so often commit. He has taken the electricity out of our cage so that we can roam freely and fearlessly and though we continue to struggle to live the kind of lives he would want us to live, we know that the day will come when the cage of this sinful world will be behind us and we will roam freely and joyfully in paradise.**

**Christ is not oblivious to the fact that it is a burden to live as his child in this world. He knows that burden better than any of us, because he bore that burden to the cross! He came into our system and he changed it from one of condemnation and helplessness to one of joy, forgiveness, peace and hope. Because he has compassion for us, he gives us his Word to guide us and his body and blood to strengthen us. That does not take the burden away, but it significantly lightens it and empowers us to complete our journey. No one has to be a rat in a cage. The cage is an illusion created by Satan and he twists God's Word to form bars when in fact there are no bars.**

**See, here is the truth that Satan wants no one to know. We can do anything we want. We are the heirs to the kingdom and we can do anything we want. We are the ones for whom Jesus Christ died, and we are neither trapped, nor bound by any one or any thing. Cages are satanic illusions. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed.**