

## Food for Thought

Romans 8 is the heart of Paul's letter to the Christian community in Rome, and in many ways, it is the heart of our Lutheran theology. In last week's New Testament reading, Romans 7: 15-25, the Apostle talked at length about being stuck in Sin, constantly giving in to the evil that he does not want to do. This week's New Testament reading, Romans 8: 1-11, is Paul's own answer, not only to his own struggles, but to the struggles of human beings everywhere. We can't manage to live up to the Law, no matter how much we try, says Paul, but we can allow God's Spirit to live and breathe in us. The answer lies in giving ourselves over to Jesus.

Still, Paul's complicated theological arguments about Sin and salvation can be difficult to follow. That's why I like *The Message*, a dynamic, contemporary translation of the Bible, especially when it comes to deciphering Paul's letters. In this rendering of today's text, there are two dominant images that help us get a mental picture of what he's talking about. The first has to do with being physically wounded, and the second has to do with physical living space.

Paul has no problem drawing on violent images when it comes to spiritual matters. He says that "God went for the jugular when he sent his own son" to deal with the problem of Sin. A "Band-Aid" was not enough to deal with your limitations and mine. Likewise, the Apostle says that "God leads us into the open, into a spacious, free life." Paul speaks about "God taking up residence in your life." These are vivid images that attempt to make the contrast between a self-centered life and a God-centered life real and tangible.

But do they work? Well, maybe yes and maybe no. I think that we can all see in our mind's eye what the Apostle is talking about, but these images really touch us only if we are in the same place that Paul is. Do we feel like we are hemorrhaging from Sin as we're sitting in the pew on Sunday morning? Do we feel cramped and boxed-in by our old life, longing for new freedom? Probably not. Most of us feel pretty healthy, despite our Sin-wounds, and we probably think that we have all the freedom that we could ever want. And that's the problem. Until you and I feel the pain of our self-centered lives as acutely as Paul did, a new God-centered life will never look all that appealing.

Paul is painting a picture of a preferred future here. Whether we feel it or not, there is more to life than we know. A life lived in God is rich, vibrant, and joyous, and the wonderful Good News in Paul's message is that we don't have to do anything to earn it. In fact, we can't do anything to earn it. Romans 8 is a call to surrender. It is a plea to let God be in charge of our lives. God wants to move in and show us a new way. All you and I need to do is admit that we need the help. But that can be easier said than done!

- 1) Which of Paul's images of Sin resonates with you more—wounds or cramped living space?
- 2) Can't you think of another image?
- 3) Name one thing that you could do this week to begin to surrender to God.