

The Reverend David Peterson's Sermon for July 5th 2026 – 8 AM
Henrietta's House Narrative

There is a story I remember called *Henrietta's House* – by Elizabeth Goudge and in the story there is the Dean of the Cathedral a very proud, intelligent man, a priest but he has fallen into the trap of paying more attention to his title as head of the cathedral and has paid less and less attention to his ministry as a servant of Christ, and he knows, on some level, that he lives the life of an imposter.

He knows he's a bit of a charlatan.

In this story there is a Christ-like character a young girl called Henrietta who has the ability to gently draw people back to who they should be – their better selves.

She once asks the Dean an important question she says to him, "Who do you really want to be?" And in a beautiful moment in the story the light breaks in upon him and he can put aside the façade of his life and says very humbly "I want to be the man that you think I am."

It's a lovely book and it came to mind when I was reading over the epistle for today.

In this, Paul is having a moment like the Dean he is honestly assessing who he is. Paul must have had a complex and troubled life starting off hunting the early Christians sending religious police to arrest people who were the *Followers of the Way* and then having his conversion on the road to Damascus and now living with the guilt of it.

He feels torn apart by his own nature that falls so short of who he wants to be and he is confused by his nature: "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." He recognizes sin within him and yet delights in God and wants to follow God's law.

He is conflicted and in near despair writes "Wretched person that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Paul's journey has taught him that human nature pulls in two directions who we want to be versus who we are. Paul wants to be a good man he wants to be a righteous man before the Lord and he falls so far short.

Perhaps we identify with him? How often we try to do the right thing to be a good servant of Jesus and how often we cannot. Perhaps that is human nature – a mix of good and evil that is at war.

A psychology magazine I read said the Human Beings are really schizophrenic in nature and that we are capable of great and wonderful things such as magnificent buildings and acts of great compassion such as the rescue work in Venezuela and also we are capable of so many abysmal acts of evil... and often when we are given an opportunity we shrug it off.

I heard this week of a group of philanthropists and charities who were in conversation with a very rich man. He asked "how much would it take to end world hunger?" They replied about 6.5 Billion dollars. That would still leave him a multibillionaire. What an opportunity to do good and leave a legacy for all humankind. Well, world hunger still exists.

Paul knows the struggle in himself and I dare say all of us also have that conflict within us. I think we all have seen the gap between who we would like to be and who we are and in our own words many of us have said "What a wretched person I am who will rescue me?"

How can I earn God's love?"

Thanks be to God it is Jesus Christ our Lord who shows us God's love on the cross. Jesus does not expect us to be perfect. He asks us to be faithful.

He did not say to people "Follow me and be perfect" he simply said "Follow me" and the cross is our bridge that will cover the distance between who we are and who through God's grace we can become.

John Steibeck echoed these sentiments when he wrote in East of Eden, "Now that we don't have to be perfect we can be good."