READ: Romans 7:18, 19 (Common English Bible)

“I know that good doesn’t live in me – that is, in my body. The desire to do good is inside of me, but I can’t do it. I don’t do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don’t want to do.”

REFLECT:

Country trio Lady Antebellum released the title track from their album, “Ocean” on September 20, 2019. Co-lead singer, Hillary Scott, said that ‘Ocean’ stands for all of the things that we think and feel when we hear the word. Since its release, considerable liberties to personalize the story of the song and interpret it in a meaningful way for each listener are available on social media. Some interpret ‘Ocean’ as substance abuse, depression, or the difficulties that people confront in their daily lives. For Hillary, it is just seeing the beauty in someone else that they fail to see in themselves in a particular season of a relationship and begging them to open up. Ultimately, what each person hears in the lyrics belongs to the individual.

I imagine that were the apostle Paul to hear this song, ‘Ocean’ would take on the symbolic image for God, “Here you are, next to me. So much beauty at my feet. All I wanna do is swim. But the waves keep crashin’ in.” Paul sees the vast beauty that is God, desires to swim into its depths and remain there forever, “You’re an ocean, beautiful and blue. I wanna swim in you.” In these few sentences of Paul’s letter to the Roman Church, Paul speaks of his desire – the desire to do good. However, Paul has trouble. “But I can’t do it,” writes Paul. “I don’t do the good that I want to do, but I do the evil that I don’t want to do.” Paul’s frustration and desperation is clear. It is as though something prevents Paul from swimming deep into the presence and life of God, “the waves keep crashin’ in.”

Paul identifies the trouble in these few sentences, “I know that good doesn’t live in me – that is, in my body.” Sin is operative in Paul’s body. As Paul struggles to swim toward God, struggle to do what is good and pleasing to God, wave after wave of sin comes crashin’ in on Paul keeping him on the shore of the vast ocean that is God. Paul’s plea is clear in the lyrics of the song, “I’m so tired of the shore,” tired of looking out toward God but unable to enter deeply. “The waves, the waves, the waves.” Paul’s trouble is our trouble. Sin is a powerful enemy that pushes us away from entering the fullness of life in God. Moments stretch into hours into days that we fear that we will never leave the shallow waters of faith, eyes fixed on something more that is unobtainable because of the waves of sin that continue to crash-in on us.

In the middle of this haunting song, a lyric appears only once, “Baby, look at me and swear you won’t lose me.” Standing on the shore, eyes fixed on the “ocean beautiful and blue” Paul pleads to God. It is also our plea. It is a plea that in our powerlessness to swim past the waves, God will not desert us. “All I wanna do is swim. But the waves keep crashin’ in. No, I’m not afraid to drown.” The song concludes and the listener has only a sense of loneliness. Absent is a positive resolution. Do the waves ultimately prevail? Are they overcome and the lover finally joined with the object of desire, the ocean? It seems that the songwriters have also left that for individual interpretation.
Fortunately, for the readers of Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul experiences a positive resolution: “Who will deliver me?” asks Paul in verse 24. Suddenly the ocean swells, rushes to the shore in the person of Jesus Christ, and sweeps Paul out to the depths where he now discovers another stanza: “I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38).

RESPOND:

1. How has this scripture or meditation spoken to you? Pray: “What would you have me hear, O Lord?”

2. What one specific act do you intend to take, an attitude to change, a person to see, or prayer to pray? Pray: “What would you have me do, O Lord?”

PRAY:

My Savior, may my fellowship with you today be very real! Open to me the secrets of an abundant life and strengthen me for living with grace and love. Amen.