Sometimes there are nice sounding but wrong ideas which float around in society. And because they are nice sounding you might be considered a bad person if you point out that these ideas are wrong because there are enough people who simply want them to be true. And since my happy vacation vibe has worn off, I am ready to look like a bad person and challenge one of those ideas. This particular wrong idea is either the fault of Jean Jaques Rousseau, Whitney Houston or the hippies or maybe all three. I am happy to blame all of them. The idea says something to the effect that children are born pure and good and it is only society that makes them go wrong. People like the idea because who wants to say that a three-year-old is bad, I mean they are just so cute. Now before I go onto explain what I am saying it would probably be good to explain what I am not saying. I am not saying that the opposite is true. I do not believe that children are born pure evil. Rather the truth of the matter is that children are kind of like the rest of us – they have good days and they have bad days. Sometimes they are sweet and wonderful and other times they are a real pain. Again, just like the rest of us. And the reason for this mixed bag is, of course, sin but Paul does a better job of explaining it in the letter to the Romans we hear today. He says, “I do not understand my own actions….For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.” Or put more briefly, we are a big ball of contradictions – we know what to do but do not do it and we know what not to do and do it. Knowledge is not our problem, rather our problem is impulse control. And so what is the solution to this problem, this problem of acting in ways that we know are wrong? Well Paul has an answer saying, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” In other words, Jesus is the one to save us from this cycle of destructive and wicked behavior. And before I get into just what that means I want to let you know that I will eventually work my way back to the point I made about children. I did not bring it up because I had a really bad experience with a four-year-old this week.

 So, as you know Jesus is generally the right answer whenever you are asked a question in church. Paul gives that answer this morning when pondering who will save him from this body of death, but I want to explore it a little more. And to do that I want to look at this saving nature of Jesus in the context of something Paul says a little later in his letter to the Romans in regard to the nature of the body of Christ. He says this, “For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.” Paul is arguing that Jesus is not just out there but that we, as a community, participate in and help form the body of Christ. Meaning Jesus is present and represented in the community of believers. And the argument that I want to make follows in this understanding. While Jesus certainly is the correct answer to the question that Paul asks about who will rescue him, what he means by Jesus involves all of us because as Paul points out that Jesus is made present in the whole community of faith. We are not simply saying Jesus take the wheel as the cliché goes. Rather the betterment of ourselves and being cured of doing things we know we should not do comes from Jesus, but it partially comes in the context of the communion of all believers. And part of the reason I bring this up is to guard against the kind of radical individualism to which extreme Protestantism is so prone. That is where our life in faith is just about us, our Bible and God – no church is required. Rather when Paul is telling us that it is Christ who saves us, he is saying that part of the way it happens in the communion of saints or, put another way, part of the way we are rescued from this body of death is through the church.

 Here is a little story and hopefully it helps to explain why I am skeptical of good things happening when we are cut off from community. Years ago, soon after graduating from college, I moved to Minneapolis to be closer to Amy. I went there without a job and the economy was not really buzzing, so it took a little while to find work. I had only one close friend in town (Amy was living in Iowa) and my friend had a job, so he was not around a lot. What this meant in practicality was I spent a lot of time alone. I often refer to this stage as the nuttiest I have ever been. What I mean by that is I had a lot of time to think and come up with all sorts of theories and I did not really have anyone around to question my newfound wisdom. So, I went very deep into some rabbit holes and became convinced that I was right about pretty much everything. There was no one around to say, “Yes Phil the New Kids on the Block are a really bad band, but Idon’t think they are part of a communist plot.” And from this little journey into wonderland, I learned that, even as an introvert I needed a community to help guide me in the right direction. Now I realize communities can be crazy, one need look no further than the internet or West Allis but that does not mean we can discount community. Rather it points out the reason we need to be part of transcendent communities in which Christ is truly present.

 I started off this sermon by talking about the myth of sinless children and as I said I really did have a reason for bringing this up. Today we have a baptism and there is a line in the Baptismal service where the congregation is asked a question and through the answer make a promise. The question is, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?” And then the congregation is directed to answer, “We will.” You see baptism is not just an excuse to have a special service, but it is a big deal in the life of the person being baptized and a big deal in the life of the church. The newly baptized is welcomed into the community and the community promises to uphold certain standards, to be accountable. Without Christ and the community of believers there is no guidance. There is no direction in which to look to see what it is we are to be all about. Rather there are just individuals and you see how Paul describes that today. He says, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.” We need more than just ourselves and those joining the community need more than that as well. We are the body of Christ and we are called to aid Jesus in the rescue of sinful people, ourselves included. The promises we make today are about the different life to which we are called to live. For when we join the body of Christ it is so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.