

July 9, 2017 Year A Proper 9
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SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT SIN

1. INTRODUCTION

Our epistle for this morning brings up perhaps one of the most highly avoided topics in today's modern church and that of course is none other but the topic of sin. Yes sin. That nasty little three-letter word that no one likes to talk about. The word that seems to carry a life of its own as it lurks in the darkness of the shadows and yet can attack us at any moment. Even I become uncomfortable at times talking about it, because it is something that I don't necessarily want to be reminded of. In my college days when I was dating my now wife April, I attended the campus Catholic Church with her at JMU. I loved everything about the church except for the fact that each week, we would start the service with the confession of sin, and to top it off, the priest would remind us before communion that if we had not completed confession during the week, then we should abstain from coming to the table. The thought of these things turned me off. This is not a stab at the Catholic Church by the way, it is just how I experienced it as a young – trying to figure out his faith – college student. But there was something about it that I just could never become comfortable with. With all of the bad things I heard about on the news, all of the campus-wide emails from the police station about crime around the campus, all of the terrible things written in the newspapers, the last thing I wanted from church was to think about more bad things, and for me, the topic of sin seemed to be a bad thing. I wanted to come to church to talk about good things, because God is good, and God is love; God is not sin.

2. SEQUENCE 2 – INTRO PART 2

As I have matured in my faith over the years, I have come to realize that talking about sin is not such a bad thing. I still don't enjoy it, but I do think that it is a necessary part of our faith to acknowledge and bring those things to God where we have fallen short of the mark. In many ways, it feels good to let these things go, to give them up to God, to rid them from our souls so that we can be more open to God and God's plan for our lives. But because we are only human, we will never fully escape from the grasp of sin. Yes, we were created in God's image, and because God is good, we must too be good; but we are not God, and so our struggle with sin will always be with us, and I think that this is where it is helpful to look at the epistle to see just what sin really is.

3. SEQUENCE 3 –THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BATTLE

While Paul himself sounds like he is going through a psychological battle with sin, the reading is much deeper than this. Sure on a surface-level, we all have the battle of good v. evil, right v. wrong, playing in our heads when we know that what we are doing probably isn't quite right; we have all seen the little devil and the little angel sitting on our shoulders fighting back and forth with one another. Someone once told me that for them, sin is that dry, unpleasant feeling that you get between your cheeks when whatever it is you are doing seems wrong. I have had that feeling plenty of times. In fact, just last week as I was on my afternoon run in the park, I witnessed a man in who seemed to be in his early 20's get out of the car and throw himself on the ground. As he laid there on the ground he began to cry and scream as if he had just received some terrible news. Everything inside of me said that I should go see what was wrong; go provide him with some comfort in his apparent pain. But I didn't. I became frightened that somehow he may hurt me if he was in a fit of rage instead of sadness, or that he would reject my friendliness, and so, I kept on running. I let him lay there on the ground to deal with his pain by himself. I seemed like anything but the good Samaritan, and as I ran off, that feeling between my cheeks was more prominent than ever.

4. SEQUENCE 4 – BEYOND PSYCHOLOGICAL

But Paul's message travels beyond just the dry feeling between the cheeks. What Paul is trying to have the Roman church understand is that, yes, sin is partially a psychological battle of the mind, but even more importantly, sin has the ability to take things intended for good and make them bad. The law, which Paul references, is an example; the law was intended for the good of the people, yet abused and misused, it became something that was bad.

5. SEQUENCE 5 – SHRINE MONT REFLECTION

Reflecting on our trip to Shrine Mont this past weekend, and thinking about our theme, Encounters with God's Creation, I can't help but think about how Paul's message ties into the theme. From our discussion about Genesis 1, we learned that God created and saw that creation was good. The beauty of Shrine Mont, from the fresh mountain air, to the green grasses of the meadows, to the clear water of the mountain springs, makes it so very easy to see that what God created is good. But as I return to the city and see the smog in the air, the pollution in the rivers and streams, people living on the streets, I am reminded that we as humans, who were also created good by God, have at times taken what is good and made it bad, and this makes me sad. How is it that we can allow ourselves to do such a thing? How is it that I can simply run away from a fellow human-being in-need, someone that, like me, was also created good by God?

6. SEQUENCE 6 – THE GOOD NEWS

Fortunately, there is hope my friends. There is hope that someday we can return what has been made bad by sin and return it to good. And this hope comes from today's Gospel message, for after all the word Gospel in Greek means "Good news." You see my friends, in this text, Jesus is being portrayed not simply as a messenger of God's Wisdom, but is God's Wisdom himself. I don't know about you, but for me there is a big difference between learning from someone's wisdom, and learning from a list of facts and so when Wisdom is brought into the text, I think it is worth paying attention to. Thus, in the second half of the Gospel when Jesus tells the crowd that he has hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to infants, Jesus is giving us some words of wisdom. You see, what Jesus is saying to us here is that we need to keep our minds open to receiving God and God's message. If we become too pretentious, too uptight, too caught up in the mindset that what we are doing is already good enough, too worried about ourselves, we lose sight of God's goodness, and too easily let the good that God has created become bad. So let God in. Be open to what God is saying to you. God's good work in you is never done and there is always more to do. Take time to reflect on the goodness of God's creation, because it is only then that you will be able to give-up all of yourself to God.

7. SEQUENCE 7 – FINAL THOUGHTS

Jesus understood that sin lurks in the shadows, that it is too easy to succumb to distraction, too easy to follow the social norm, too easy to let something that has been created good, become bad. But Jesus also knew how to deal with and overcome these things.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Bring your burdens to God. It is okay to talk about sin, in fact, being a disciple of Christ requires that we bring our burdens to God when we have missed the mark. Looking back on my time spent in the campus Catholic Church, I now have a newfound respect for why we confessed our sins before we started worship because when we are able to bring our burdens to God, we realize that God is bigger than us, and that it is God who created good and not us, humans, that create good. So, as we come to the table in just a few minutes, don't be afraid to tell God how you have missed the mark this week. God not only forgives, but he strengthens.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." The only way for us to find rest for our souls is to bring our burdens to God. To talk with God, to be open with God, to be open to receiving God's good and wonderful message.

Therefore as we go forth from these church walls this morning, go experience God's goodness. And when you begin to feel that dry feeling between your cheeks, remember that you are a disciple of Christ so follow in his footsteps. Because if we all tried just a little bit harder to live, act, and be like Jesus our journey with sin becomes that much easier and as a result our world will become a better place and what was created good, and made bad, will become good once again.