

Sermon Text for March 5, 2017

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Genesis 3:1-7, Romans 3:21-26

“The original sin”

We had a very meaningful Ash Wednesday this past week. We looked at the different perspective of Lent from those who see a dark Lent to those, like us, who see a Lent which is focused toward the future which gives us hope and motivation for what comes next. I hope you realize that this is probably one of the greatest contributions that the reformed church, the Presbyterian Church, has to offer in this community and that is the fact that we serve God not out of fear but rather out of freedom. We do not preach the wrath of God but rather the love that God has for all of humanity and so our lives ought to be a reflection of that love. Not out of compulsion but out of gratitude. That applies to Lent as well.

I gave you all homework. We are going to allow prayer to shape and transform our lives as a church, I have a sign up sheet on my door and the goal is to have people praying for First Presbyterian Church during the entire Holy Week from Monday through Friday. We looked at prayer over Advent but really didn't do anything lasting, which can stay with us as a church. Hopefully we are still following the disciplines of prayer that we learned over Advent, but this is something we can keep as a church and allow it to transform us. We are asking each person to sign up for one hour. You don't have to come to church to pray, you can pray at your house, but we want this church bathed in prayer over the time of Holy Week.

Welcome to the first week of Lent. A time that we celebrate the preparation of our Savior in the wilderness for His ministry, a time that we remember his suffering for our sake, a time that we focus on our sin in order to offer it to the Lord knowing that He has taken that sin and washed it clean on the cross. Now, even though we don't stress putting the fear of God into someone as a motivation to faith, the reality and the seriousness of our sin ought not to escape us. Fire and brimstone sermons usually include the phrase you are sinners at least a dozen times. And it is true, we are sinners. And sin usually leads to fear. Throughout Scripture when the people of God are visited by his presence more often than not they are afraid primarily because they do not feel that they are worthy and that their sin will be self-evident to God. Also, it is just scary being visited by God or by an angel. What happened when Adam and Eve ate the apple? They

ran and hid and covered themselves. And when God finally finds Adam he states: I was afraid. He was afraid of his sin.

Sin is a reason to fear and it inevitably produces guilt. When my kids were smaller I could tell when they have done something wrong and they all acted differently but in very specific behavior patterns so you knew they had done something wrong. Rachel would do something wrong in front of you or would tell you after she had done something wrong because she knew it was wrong and she wanted us to know it. Naomi would disappear for a few moments, eat all of her Easter candy and then come running out of her room as fast as she could to get as far away from the evidence as possible and pretend that nothing has happened. Bethany so loved being around us that she would bring the evidence with her, put the whole candy with the wrapper in her mouth or in her hand and try to play UNO as if nothing had happened.

In all of us, when we sin, it produces fear and it produces actions that try to compensate for that fear. Those actions ultimately lead us to a spiral that very quickly spins out of our control. Today we are going to talk about sin and see where it all started and what impact that original sin, that first sin, has had upon us. From Genesis to Romans we have the story of how God loves us and how we don't love God back as we ought but God keeps loving us all the way to Christ where that love is made known. We will see how this original sin leads to undeserved and free grace.

READ SCRIPTURE

These verses in Romans are best known for verse 23 which states “for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”. This verse is used by some as incontrovertible evidence that all have sinned, regardless of who you are. In fact, this verse is used as the cornerstone in an evangelism strategy called the Roman Road which is supposed to lead some people to Christ. You know it, right? It is a Road through Romans that is supposed to open the eyes of people to the power of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But vs. 23 is just the first step in a bad news/good news scenario that Paul creates in these verses. The bad news is that all have sinned, the good news is that all have been justified by grace.

Let's look at the bad news first. Genesis 3 gave us what theologians would call the original sin. The fall of humanity that manifested itself first not merely by the eating of the apple, but by disobeying God for the purpose as the serpent states: to become like

God. This is the original sin that continues to manifest itself and that is that we are not content to be the clay, but we want to be the potter, we are not content to be the creature, we want to be the creator, we are not content to be Adamah, the dust, but we want to be YHWH, God.

Our disobedience is a sign that we think we know best or that we can somehow profit by going against the law. Adam's disobedience is a very good parallel to our disobedience in that we are intoxicated with ourselves and our desire to run our own lives irrespective of what we know God would have us do. We lose sight of what God has planned for us if we could stay in relationship with him, but we break that relationship, become autonomous, try to call the shots, try to be like God.

In Romans 5:18 we read that one man's sin led to condemnation for all. Are you telling me that we believe in an original sin that is passed on from generation to generation and that I was born sinful just because of something that happened millions of years ago? Are we truly born sinful, guilty from the time of our conception as Psalm 51:5 seems to imply?

Our church fathers from the time Christ died through St. Augustine up until Calvin said yes, we were born with original sin that we inherited from Adam. The baptism of infants by midwives at the bedside was a common practice because all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God so we better get them baptized as soon as possible.

Calvin changed that understanding from which ultimately blamed sin on Adam, to placing the blame for sin on us. He said we don't inherit the guilt, or even the sin of Adam but rather a propensity to sin. What does that mean? That means that every single person is born with the inclination, the desire to be like God, to sin. Some argue that we are born with genetic dispositions for actions or lifestyles that some consider sinful. Yes, we are all born with genetic wiring that creates in us a desire to sin because all of us want to be in charge. This is what we mean by original sin, that we are solely responsible for our sin. Not Adam, not our families, not our mothers or our fathers, not our children, but we are responsible for our sin.

This is the bad news. But Paul doesn't have us wait long to hear the good news. Right after saying all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God he states: but we are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Do

not focus in solely on the bad news, but always follow it up with the good news, with the gospel of which we are not ashamed.

Paul here lays out the incontrovertible evidence of God's grace. Just as sin entered the world through Adam so Romans 5:18 states so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. The answer to sin is not found in us, but in Jesus Christ, in that act that we celebrate during lent. Jesus Christ eliminates this universal sin and replaces it with his universal love.

Verse 25 Paul states that God passes over our sins because of the blood of Christ that was shed in the sacrifice for us. This term Passover we have seen before and in fact we saw how closely related it was to our Christian understanding of Easter and the important role it plays in Maundy Thursday. In the Jewish Passover it was the blood of the lamb that protected the people of God from the angel of death which passed over. Here in Romans we see that the blood of Christ is effective through faith. It is the faith of the people of God that serves as the sign of God that these are my people.

If sin separates us from God, our faith draws us closer to him. Christ justifies those who have faith in him. Original sin is our sin which has been erased by the love of God seen in his sacrifice and resurrection in which we take part by our faith, or our trust in God which manifests itself by trusting others.

This first Sunday in Lent, be fully aware of your sinfulness. We are all sinners. There is no second part to that. Yes, we are redeemed by the blood of Jesus, but we have to be aware and deal with our sin. Allow this Lent to be a time when we deal with our sin, don't get stuck in our past sin which prevents us from seeing toward the future. Allow God to work in your lives just as he has worked through the original sin. Amen.