

First Sunday of Lent March 5th 2017

Temptation and SIN

Prayer: God, every day we face temptations and distractions that block our way to following Jesus teachings. Our good intentions to love our neighbour and live with respect for creation, get lost and even forgotten when we are tempted by the quick and easy way. God we seek your reassurance that we can always turn back to you for forgiveness and acceptance. Now may the thoughts and words that we share be Your word for us today. Amen

I knew this would be a full service so I chose a short three letter word for today, SIN.

I am not comfortable talking about SIN but the readings for today seemed to focus on this word. I was tempted to find an easier message but temptation is the other predominant theme in the readings. Of course temptation is one of the ways to define sin. SIN is allowing temptations to distract us from God. My simple understanding for SIN is anything that alienates me from God. Anything that comes between me and my relationship with the divine.

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, a solemn time in the church year as we symbolically journey towards Good Friday. On Ash Wednesday, Christians are invited to enter a period of self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, and self-denial. Christians are encouraged to use these forty days as a time of particular reflection on our sins, the way we separate our-selves from God and one another. This sounds like a somber solemn purpose for Lent. It is an opportunity to be more open to God's forgiveness, grace and love.

I am sure you know me well enough that this is not what I expect you to practice for Lent. Of course taking time to reflect on our relationship with God is a very worthwhile spiritual practice and one filled with blessings. It reminds me of my 8 day silent retreat. Yes, I did it and it was amazing. This time in the church year is an opportunity to pick up a spiritual practice so you can reconnect with God. Find some extra God time.

This book-mark is a gift for you to reflect on during Lent. A Holy Fast and a Holy Feast. I hope you will use it.

Now back to talking about SIN. The passage from Romans speaks most directly about SIN. I found this comment on Romans by Christopher Beeley, very thought provoking: (Feasting on the Word: Year A p. 40)

“ If sin is original to our condition and therefore unavoidable, it is also deeper and more insidious than we might think. By turning against God, our neighbour, and ourselves, we bring about the ruin of all that is good in the world: the consequence of sin is death in the fullest sense of the word. Sin and death are not mere annoyance or particular flaws of human life; they are the central and ultimately destructive problem of our existence in which human society is catastrophically trapped. “

Douglas John Hall continues this theme of “the destructive problem of our existence “ when he interprets the temptations we heard in the dramatic reading from Matthew. The first temptation; to turn stones into bread, is like a “miracle” that sets aside the laws of nature. The temptation for people to abuse the environment and take control over natural order. The second temptation; for Jesus to throw himself off a pinnacle. We might see this as a “dare devil” act. (excuse the pun)

We honour heroes especially when they do it for their own gain! Something spectacular for the media!?! With all the media attention, the most blatant exhibitionist can seem irresistible to the voiceless and invisible. The third temptation; to worship power and control more than worshipping God. “ Human beings – individually and corporately, institutionally – all know the pull and quest for power.” These are destructive problems in our society today. We get used to powerful people following any agenda but God’s agenda.

Temptations come close to each of us, too. Temptation comes to us in moments when we look at others and feel insecure about not having enough. Temptation comes in judgements we make about strangers or friends who make choices we do not understand. Temptation rules us, making us able to look away from those in need and to live our lives unaffected by poverty, hunger and disease. Temptation wins when we allow our temper to define our lives. Temptation wins when we engage in the justification of little lies, small sins, a racist joke; a questionable business practice for the greater good, a criticism of a spouse or partner or acquaintance when he or she is not around. Temptation wins when we get so caught up in the trappings of life that we lose sight of life itself. These are the faceless moments of evil that, while mundane, lurk in the recesses of our lives, our minds and our souls.

Then there is the story of the Tree of Good and Evil. I don’t need to elaborate on the tree of knowledge, the tree of good and evil. We know that we make choices all the time. We have the freedom of choice. How we use or abuse that choice is our responsibility.

Now, my choice and responsibility is **to affirm the Good news of God’s love and forgiveness.**

Sin and temptation are deeply rooted, unavoidable and devastating **but the grace of God** far exceeds the power of sin and death. God is on our side against sin and death, and **nothing can separate us from God’s abundant grace and love in Jesus Christ.**

In Romans, Paul is trying to impress on us that Christ did not die and rise again merely to provide a bit of needed improvement. He died to save us from a mortal disease that lies at the core of our being, affecting all of our thoughts words and deeds, corrupting human society as a whole, The truth about sin is a central part of the gospel because it illuminates our real condition before God and consequently, the **depth of love, mercy and forgiveness that God offers in Christ.**

And finally the psalmist lifts our spirits these words: “Happy are you whose sins are forgiven and covered.” We can rejoice and be glad **God’s forgiveness offers us relief and joy.**

God is always with us as we continue this journey through Lent together. Thanks be to God.