

#16 10-11

Awareness of Sin

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Matthew 4:1-11

Romans 5:12-19

12Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned – 13sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. 14Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. 15But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. 16And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. 17If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. 18Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. 19For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. 20But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, 21so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this first Sunday in Lent, we have been given an interesting collection of scriptures, all dealing with the concept of sin. We revisited the source of our sin in the Old Testament reading. Psalm 32 was a song of joy from a person who was open and honest with God and happy because as a result of sharing his life with God, that person was forgiven. Our Gospel shows us how even Jesus was tempted by sin, but continued to focus his attention on God, thus freeing him from the devil and was cared for by angels.

And today's sermon scripture is from Paul's letter to the Romans, one of his clearest and most unremitting theological theses. This text takes us back to the Old Testament scripture - back to Adam and Eve and their disobedience to God, which brought about sin and death. And Paul is saying, just as one man's sin - Adam's sin - brought about sin and death, one man's act of righteousness - Jesus' steadfastness to God, that we witnessed in our Gospel reading - counteracts that first act and freely gives us all freedom and life. A balance of humanity has occurred. We all have the chance to have something that even Moses didn't have because what Jesus did, was free us from all the sin and guilt from Adam's day.

Wow. That must be the hardest theological concept to get our minds around, because we cling to our guilt. We have such a hard time letting go of our focus on ourselves. Shame and guilt control more of our behaviors than we would ever really care to recognize. We've been trained to be modest and somehow the idea that we are good people, loved immensely, keeps getting lost in all the other messages out there.

But if there was a way to *void* all the messages that we have ever gotten, and sometimes still get, which tell us we aren't good enough, we might be able to understand how much God loves us -

what Jesus actually did for us – and could do for us at any time. Just as Jesus was able to resist the Devil by keeping his focus on God’s will, we have the example of Jesus’ love for us to help us overcome the pain of those people who have tried to tell us we aren’t good enough, all those messages telling us that we have yet to earn God’s forgiveness for our sins.

Life is a series of moments – all of eternity can be found in this one moment right now. In this moment, all that was ever done in the past doesn’t count any more – even the good stuff – but also the bad. Right now even if we are facing the death and destruction of a 8.9 earthquake and following Tsunami, we *could* feel the comfort and the presence of a power greater than we could imagine. Jesus Christ has provided for us a free gift of grace – the gift of oneness with God – anytime we want. Sort of.

As wonderful as it seems, and the promise is there that it is true, there just seems to be something about our human nature that keeps us from being able to get our minds and hearts around this amazing gift. We keep hearing the tapes of humans in our lives who have told us that we aren’t good enough, or they have not given us the chance to think for ourselves. In trying to be good children, good citizens, we hang on to images of ourselves that seem as impossible to shake as the original sin.

Paul is telling us that Jesus has overcome Adam’s sin. In many pictures of the crucifixion you may have noticed a skull at the foot of the cross, often with the blood of Jesus dripping on it. This is the skull of Adam, and Christ’s blood is poured over it to overcome the concept of humanity’s inability to overcome sin.

We have a free gift of love and acceptance, of forgiveness and grace, and yet, it seems to be one of the most difficult gifts to accept. Perhaps it is because we, as human beings, have lost track of the purpose of our lives. We think that those who die with the most toys wins, when in fact, those who die with the fewest toys and the most love, wins. We worry about the end of our lives and don’t trust God that we will be OK – so we don’t spend the money or give the time that we could today, for ourselves, and for others.

Fear keeps us from being in the present moment focusing on Christ. Fear is taught to us as children, and although we may think that fear is important, it isn’t. We *can* teach our children, and re-teach ourselves how to care for ourselves without using fear. Fear equals sin – perfect loves castes out fear – we can be aware of life’s dangers without fear. Fear stops us from being able to accept the free gift of the grace that Jesus lived so hard and so true to provide for us.

This first Sunday of Lent we contemplate sin, and what the events that led up to, and including the resurrection, mean for us as followers of Christ. We are told by Paul in his letter to the Romans, “¹⁹For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.”

Obedience – Jesus obeyed God, because he loved his father with all his heart, all his mind and all his soul. And when we, out of gratitude for what Jesus did in his life on this earth for us, love the same, we share in his resurrection – we share in the grace – we can be as happy as the psalmist was, “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”