

Sermon: Sin-Sick World
Scripture: Romans 6:1-11
Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans
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Thank you Jerry and Katherine and Paul and Karen! It's good to have Paul read after his name's sake the Apostle Paul and with a voice to accompany the gravity of the Apostle Paul's words. I like his "so be it!" And I should probably leave it to Paul's "so be it" but I'm going to venture out in this treacherous terrain where scripture meets the current day in all its' turmoil and struggle and pray to offer something to break open God's word here.

As thorny as the Apostle Paul can come across, the language of SIN that he leans into with gusto and that we can tend to shy away from in our liberal protestant Christian traditions, it's critical not to relinquish the language of sin too quickly in our efforts to understand and address human failure and waywardness which we see and know these days only far too well.

The secular world tends to speak of human failure within the language framework of medicine and law. Human failure is sickness that needs to be healed from a psycho-scientific point of view and from a legal framework its crime that must have consequences. However in the words of the church, human failure is sin that needs repentance, forgiveness and redemption.

With the language of sin, we submerge into a deeper level of things, the level of the human soul and the divine root out of which life springs. To speak of what's wrong with ourselves and our world with the language of sin is to approach the dilemma with the assumption, the understanding or belief that the world has been created with a rational and natural moral order, a good and holy structure, that requires one way of living and being in it and forbids

other ways. Sin is essentially, as Paul Tillich said, separation from God or you could say, separation from or the breaking of this good and holy order of things.

If you were to boil down the Judeo-Christian scripture to one particular theme, you'd be justified in suggesting that it's all about the human relationship with the divine that follows the arc of union with God, disunion or separation from God, and then the journey back to union. That is the arc of salvation history as told by the Bible.

The Apostle Paul in his experience of the resurrected Jesus, experienced from deep in his bones, from his insides out, this very earth-shattering, mind-blowing ultimate return to God and God's good order. It had become for him "on earth as it was in heaven" in the blink of an eye and through all those millennia of human searching and waiting for a returning to God's presence and a restoring of God's order, it was fulfilled... except not exactly.

In Paul's understanding, Jesus had destroyed sin, human separation from God, but it wasn't quite complete yet... which was evident in the sufferings, persecution, and conflict within and around the earliest Christian communities to whom he was writing. And that's what Paul was addressing when he wrote his letter to the Romans... how Christ destroyed sin by dying on the cross and yet how sin was still apparently in the world. And 2000 years later we can still ask, "wait, what?" How do you mean "Jesus, the lamb of God takes away the sin of the world", we sure wish it was away but it's still here.

Paul's explanation for that is an already but not yet wiggle. Jesus has already defeated sin and it's ultimate end game DEATH and yet the final fulfillment of that has not come to be, so we live in an in-between time. But

we live in the in-between time LIBERATED without the overwhelming power of sin and undermining fear of death determining us, knowing it's already been handled, it's already been conquered and rendered powerless. Now it's our work and privilege to live no longer a slave to sin but freed in Christ.

So let's get real practical about this without any more ado.

Racism is sin. The belief that one kind of skin color is superior and more deserving and actions that arise out of that belief are a blight on the human soul. The systems and structures around us that help white people feel safe and get ahead and protect themselves while keeping it's thumb on blacks, making them unsafe and holding them back from getting ahead is a stain on human society. It's sinful, pure and simple. To witness a white man's knee on a black man's throat that chokes off his life as he pleads for breath, might mean that there is a man who is psychologically sick and need to be healed, who is a criminal and needs to be prosecuted, and it likely means that our *society* is broken and we need to work at fixing it, but it's also really clear evidence that we humans have fallen from God, from God's good order, and we need to be saved! It is evidence of sin and death's domain still in this world. And yet, we have proclaimed that our savior has already come. So what does this mean for us as Christians?

Well, it requires our participation as people infused and inspired by the resurrected Christ's Spirit to be involved ourselves in taking away the sin of the world. As Paul was pushing his people to realize in the face of so much persecution, we cannot look at such brutality and depravity and stand silent, and still and hopeless before it, because Jesus has already defeated that death and his minions of sins! So then we do not have to fear and circle the wagons and squirrel away from the world of sin but inspired by the infiltrating and

expanding of Jesus' Holy Spirit within us we can step up and step into situations where sin is pretending like it has control and we can act and insist and work for something more sacred and holy, knowing sin is full of you know what and has no ultimate power in this world.

And what better way to live into the sin-sick world as though sin and death have no dominion but to finally recognize and confront the scourge and on-going trauma that the legacy of slavery, of white people owning and commodifying black people, has left on the soul of our nation. We ignore such sin at our own peril and allow it and it's master death to have much more dominion than is necessary since we've already been saved by the blood of Christ.

No more blood needs be spilt! Our good no more needs to come from someone else's bad! Our victory no more needs to mean someone else's defeat!

Somehow we white people of European descent in particular have had such trouble believing and accepting these truths and the black-skinned people around us have been the scapegoats, the sacrificial lambs for our well-being and our progress even though our brown-skinned savior, Jesus, died to stop all that self-justifying scapegoating of others, once and for all! Why don't we believe it? For millennia our job as Christians has simply been to live into this new reality where sin and death are no more and no one ever has to be sacrificed again for anyone else!

Jesus died and suffered on the cross so we can stop that now! We don't have to crucify brown and black people on the crosses of our society. We can stop our social distancing of them from us for God has reconciled all of us to Godself self already and invited us to live fully into God's good order now,

God's beloved community. It's already done and still needs to be accomplished!

We are more beautiful together than we are separate. We are more blessed moving towards one another and giving of ourselves to one another in body and soul than we are when we are sheltered and protected and grasping on to what is ours. We know what is good and right. It is built into our bones and into creation itself. We just forget sometimes. Let's remember. Let's remember.