

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
June 21, 2020 3rd Sunday after Pentecost
207 South Brodie St. Thunder Bay
<http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

Words of Welcome

Last year I read an article from the New York Time entitled, *Raising Children Without the Concept of Sin*.¹ I will say that over the centuries we have managed to really use the word “sin” to make life one of hardship and for twisted purposes. Yet, it is a word in the Bible that could probably use a conversation as the Bible is supposed to be helpful and life giving. Let's have that conversation today.
We begin with a call to worship.

Call to Worship

Rejoice! God's love is poured out for you!
How awesome is God who showers us with love!
This is a day of celebration!
Let's celebrate God's mighty healing love.
It's time to worship!

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8232/worship-connection-june-21-2020>

Hymn

When we are living

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1. When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus,
and when we're dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
2. Through all our living, we our fruits must give.
Good works of service are for offering.
When we are giving, or when receiving,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
3. 'Mid time of sorrow and in times of pain,
when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,
whether we suffer, or sing rejoicing,
we belong to God; we belong to God.
4. Across this wide world, we shall always find
those who are crying with no peace of mind,
but when we help them, or when we feed them,
we belong to God; we belong to God.

"When we are living," Words: Romans 14:8; paraphrase, v.1., anonymous; translation, EliseS. Eslinger, v.2-4, Roberto Escamilla; translation, George Lockwood. Music Hispanic folk song. © The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989
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¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/25/well/family/raising-children-without-the-concept-of-sin.html>. Accessed June 20, 2020.

Opening Prayer

God of grace, you created our minds to grow in wisdom. You created our hearts to expand with love for you and your world. You created our voices to sing your praises forever. Fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit, so we may worship you in spirit and in truth, bold and unafraid to follow you.

God who creates the future, you call us to follow you, yet we confess we prefer to remain where we are. You offer us new beginnings, yet we continue to make the same familiar choices. You invite us into the fullness of life, yet we distance ourselves from you and each other through fear and doubt. Forgive us, O God.

Cleanse from us every unworthy thought, word and deed with the grace of Christ our Lord. Open to us your word through the reading of scripture and through the worship we bring. Rouse us by the Spirit to be intentional, courageous disciples even when the world does not welcome us or the word we proclaim in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

In Christ, we are made a new creation; the old life is gone, and the new life has come! Know that God loves you and forgives you. Do not be afraid to make a new start!

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Scripture Reading Romans 6:1b-11

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

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The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Message Romans 6:1b-11 Newness of Life

Here is an excerpt from the article I mentioned in the opening about *Raising Children Without the Concept of Sin*. The writer is Julia Scheeres

My religious fundamentalist childhood was built around the fear of sin. My daughters don't even know the word.

We were standing in line for meat pies at the Great Dickens Christmas Fair. The indoor arena south of San Francisco had been transformed into Victorian London; actors wearing top hats and crinolines roamed about wishing fairgoers "Happy Christmas." As we contemplated the menu — *haggis or shepherd's pie?* — a noisy band of temperance advocates marched by hoisting signs that stated, "Gin is Sin!"

As my 9-year-old daughter watched them pass, her forehead knitted, and then she looked up at me with solemn hazel eyes.

"Mama, what is sin?" she asked.

The merriment of the fair receded and I stared at her, my brain spinning with the magnitude of her question. By failing to teach my child the meaning of the word sin, had I somehow failed to give her a moral foundation?

Sin. That tiny word still makes me cringe with residual fear. Fear of being judged unworthy. Fear of the eternal torture of hell. Fear of my father's belt.²

I wonder how many of us still have an understanding of sin that makes one cringe with residual fear. As a Christian I have long been wrestling with talk of sin. So often the response to my questions about sin seemed to end with "Jesus died for our sins." That never got me closer to an understanding of sin and why Jesus had to die for my sin, but it seemed to satisfy those who tried to answer my questions. And to be honest, I am still working out my understanding.

What I have figured out it is that Jesus life, death, and resurrection have a lot more to do with my living than I ever will be able to fully understand. I have figured out that God's love is far more important and explains a lot more than the need of a vengeful God that loves me yet somehow needs the spilling of blood to atone for my sin.

The themes of sin, death, resurrection, and new life are far bigger than I can handle in a few minutes of a sermon, but maybe what I can do is start a conversation, inspire you to start learning and reading more about all of this, because, in the end, it is about newness of life. Newness of life is something our world is screaming out for at this time, and as Christians we have something to offer, God has something to offer. God really wants creation and all people within creation to experience newness of life.

First off, remembering the history of the world, we need to acknowledge that the cross has often been used to intimidate, colonize, and strike fear into people. In a way, the cross is the sign of intimidation and fear. The Romans nailed people to crosses, not just Jesus, but any insurrectionist on a cross as a clear sign of who was in control and held the power. This is also why the cross can be such a powerful symbol for life when one

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/25/well/family/raising-children-without-the-concept-of-sin.html>. Accessed June 20, 2020.

recognizes that Jesus died on a cross, but that death did not hold him. Jesus rose from that moment, took hold of death and brought life to the world again.

The cross without Jesus on it is the symbol of hope that life does not end in death, there is eternal life. Yet this leads us to another notion that has hung around for years, that somehow the cross is only about eternal life and has little to do with our living right now, and to end with that would be a mistake. How else could the Apostle Paul write about walking in newness of life if it was only happened after we died. Where is the hope in our day to day living in that?

Another piece about sin that may be something we forget is that the Bible is not just talking about individual sin, in that as individuals we are sinful. Beyond that thinking and as importantly, the Bible talks about corporate sin, meaning the sins of the people together. Speaking in this way we are talking about systems and structures that are sinful. We are living through this in a moment in time where we see that colonization, racism, decisions by governments and by those in powerful circles can exclude and dehumanize, or at the very least not value those who are part of the LGBTQ community, people do not have white skin, or live in poverty, refugees, and the many women who face struggle in the work place, in their communities, and in their homes.

Sin is many things, but one thing is for sure, we all live with it. We sin all the time. It can be in how we have spoken to others, how we think, how we participate in or condone systems and structures that allow for some to have much and others to suffer when every person is of equal value. No one life is more important than another. To this end to understand the concept of sin and to teach it to our children is not something to be avoided.

Anytime we have thought of ourselves as more important than another person we have participated in systems that have taught us that some how we have more value than another human being, from the struggling addict living on the streets, to the black man shot when time should have been taken to deescalate a situation, to when indigenous woman are murdered or missing. We don't question why there is struggle. We don't take time to listen to the stories, to care. Instead we make judgement calls. It is done often without us taking the time to even question why we think or feel this way, but there is no doubt that we have all felt that we were above someone at sometime because of our status or power in comparison to another.

When we look at Paul's writing about sin, being buried with Christ by baptism into death, we want to look away, not sit with what that means. Death and sin are two topics we prefer to stay clear of. They make us feel uncomfortable and in the case of the verses we heard today, it is frankly confusing, irritating, and appears out-dated. Again, there is no way to cover the fullness of what can be pondered in this short time together, but a few thoughts.

What if Jesus death was not about an angry God who needs retribution for sin? What if Jesus' death is not about him being the ultimate example of love? N.T. Wright states,

“The New Testament insists, in book after book, that when Jesus of Nazareth died on the cross, *something happened as a result of which the world is a different place.*”³

What if the point was that something happened in Jesus death and resurrection on the cross that resulted in the world being a different place? When Jesus died it did not mean that sin had left the world never to be dealt with again. We know for a fact that we struggle, the world struggles. It is part of the human condition. We also know that God is a relational God. God wants to be in relationship with us and desires that we be in loving relationship with one another. Sin is the piece that breaks relationship. What had been happening for centuries didn't bring about the world that God had desired for us. The cross though, that is about relationship. It is about forgiveness. But to forgive implies judgement and frankly none of us likes to be judged. We don't like the cross because it means that we are being judged and most of us consider ourselves pretty good people. The cross is also the least likely place we expect to find God. Remember the cross was a symbol of power over others. Yet Jesus does not seem very powerful as he dies.

This is the surprise of the cross. It is where God shows up to reveal God's love for all. It is because of love and desire for relationship that sin matters. Sin gets in the way of love and fullness of life, in fact can keep us dead to life. When we understand ourselves as “buried with Jesus by baptism into death so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4), it has meaning because it tells us that we can live differently, that because of the cross the world can be and is a different place.

Today, it is our gift to be able to bring a message of hope for life, *new life*, to a world that is aching, groaning, for life. The message is a different world, a new system that finds value in the life of every human being, that loves people into relationship with God, each other, and with themselves.

We have just scratched the surface here, my prayer is that you may be inspired to continue to lean into an understanding of the cross that is life-giving, that does not make you fearful, but rather determined to seek out this life-giving God who offers newness of life to the world. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of compassion and courage,
In our weakness you are strength.
In our darkness you are light.
In our sorrows you are comfort and peace.
Embrace each situation we remember in our prayers this day
with your steadfast love.

³ Wright. N.T. *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion*. HarperCollins. New York. 2016. P39.

We thank you for moments of joy that still break into our lives,
even in the strange times of pandemic and re-opening of our communities:
for love given and received,
for friends who furnish our life with meaning and happiness,
and for family who embrace us with love and understanding.
And we thank you for all caring and faithful fathers celebrated this day,
remembering those whose fathers have died
and praying for those fathers cut off from their families.

God of the nations

We pray for our country and countries around this world
so deeply affected by COVID-19.

Guide leaders to make wise decisions about reopening communities,
and give patience and courage to those whose lives have been disrupted,
especially those who fear what the future holds.

Wherever injustice rules and misinformation confuses,
protect the vulnerable and shine the light of your truth
to reveal the path to justice and renewed hope.

God of compassion

We pray for peace to prevail in places torn by war,
and ask that respect for human life will grow
wherever people are abused or scorned.

We pray for all those who are suffering and for all who mourn significant loss.
Surround them with your love and support them with the strength of your Spirit.
Open our eyes to see how we might bring comfort to those who are hurting.

Eternal God, you hold the dead as well as the living in your tender care.

We thank you for your people in every age who have entered into your heavenly
presence, especially those dear to our own hearts.

Keep us in communion with them and bring us to dwell with them at the last in your
everlasting light, as we live today in the newness of Christ.

Hear us as we offer prayers in silence for the concerns on our hearts this day...

And now we pray together in the words that Jesus taught us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be
done on earth as it is heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts
as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For
thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen

Invitation to make an offering

Pentecost season celebrates the gifts of the Spirit energized in the Church to touch the world with God's love and mercy, God's truth and justice. Whatever you offer back to God becomes a gift which can change the world for the sake of Jesus Christ.

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Hymn

We know that Christ is raised and dies no more

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1. We know that Christ is raised and dies no more;
embraced by futile death, he broke its hold,
and our despair he turned to blazing joy: hallelujah!
2. We share by water in his saving death;
this union brings to being one new cell,
a living and organic part of Christ: hallelujah!
3. The Father's splendour clothes the Son with life;
the Spirit's fission shakes the church of God;
baptized we live with God the Three-in-one: hallelujah!
4. A new creation comes to life and grows
as Christ's new body takes on flesh and blood;
the universe restored and whole will sing: hallelujah!

"We know that Christ is raised and dies no more," Words John Brownlow Geyer.
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Benediction

God has given you all that you will need
as you reach out in love and caring to others.
Go into God's world bringing the good news
of redemption and hope.
In Jesus' Name, go in peace
and may the God of Peace go with you always. Amen.

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