

...we deceive ourselves. A sermon preached on September 25, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC , as part of a series on I John by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons; I JOHN 1:8-10

LUKE 6:42

One of the unavoidable realities in reading scripture and in living out the Christian life, Is that it does not take long before the matter of sin hits front and centre.

Here we are not even out of the first chapter of John's letter and John is talking about it (vs. 8-10) – the lesson William read this morning. Some would say the church preaches about sin too much

Others say, the church does not preach about it enough.

Many years ago, there was an older gentleman I often met at the Mount Allison pool.

John was the child of a Methodist minister and a member of St. Andrew's, Presbyterian.

He was very hard of hearing and so he compensated for his deafness by speaking loudly.

In an indoor pool setting, noise already echoes.

Frequently when he saw me on a Monday morning,

He would motion me over and then in a strident voice say, 'we need to be reminded a lot today about sin.

Don't be afraid to speak boldly about SIN

Everyone in and around the pool heard John
In fact, I often think he was heard on the street.

I appreciate to this day my parishioner John's counsel and I hear his voice in my mind as I begin today

For he would appreciate greatly the letter writer John in these no nonsense and very straight-forward verses.

Nothing conditional here

Nothing wishy washy

Nothing here that says, well, it depends or sort of

What can we affirm from John's letter?

Well, first it has never been a popular truth has it – the truth of sin

Many in the church become twitchy about the very mention of the reality of sin

Or that they could in any way be described as committing, engaging or behaving as a sinful person.

Mention the word sin to many – even within the church and many look the other way, or change the subject or giggle nervously.

Its old fashioned some say

The church of an earlier age delighted in calling people out on their sins and that's why many don't come to church today!

All this talk of sin and preaching about it made people live a cramped, narrow, restrictive life – and who needs that today.

Others say, 'so long as we do our best and look to God occasionally for a little help, Then everything can be put right.

We must not take these things too seriously; to be a Christian is to be as decent as we can be and to do good and so on – expecting a certain amount of and from God.

So we say our prayers and attend an occasional act of worship and thus we go on.

We must not think of those tragic terms of desperate sin and some overwhelming need of the grace of God.'

If we grew within the Roman Catholic tradition, catechism classes rehearsed what mortal and venial sins were

Classes gave quizzes on lists of these sins – what were mortal and what venial sins?

The sins that separate us from God (mortal) and the sins that do not break our relationship with God, although they do injure it (venial).

Easy to allow that sort of teaching to ossify and calcify without providing good, sound parameters on sinful behavior.

Though, at least talking about mortal and venial sins admitted the reality of sin

Many Protestants grew up having only some vague notion that sin was wrong, Without knowing why it was wrong, or even without any clear idea of what was meant by sinful behavior and actions
It had something vaguely to do with disobeying God!

For John though, there is nothing obscure, obtuse or vague about the reality of sin.

SIN IS UNIVERSAL – all people are subject to and touched by sin

SIN MUST BE CONFESSED TO or we will not be the people God so wishes us to be. That is, if we are to enjoy true fellowship with God, we must be honest before God about where, when, how and why we have sinned.

BATTLING WITH SIN WILL LAST A LIFETIME.

The mark of the true follower of Jesus is not sinlessness, but sin consciousness
In this life, we never get beyond the awareness of remaining sin.

Such awareness is not meant to make us feel that we will always be miserable worms

Rather, such awareness is meant to make us more deeply appreciative and thankful of God's action in Christ toward teach of us.

Before we look at these realities, consider this as a working definition of sin

Sin is those actions, behaviors, thoughts things that drive wedges or cause breaks in our relationship with God, with others and within ourselves.

Sin is universal. Not I you say. Didn't you get the memo – each one of us is a sinner
Sooner or later, each one of us engage, are complicit in thought and action in things that drive wedges, cause breaks in our relationship with God with others and within ourselves.

I have long been moved by Paul's forthright honesty in his own struggles with sin (Roms 7:15-25)

¹⁵ I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰ Now if

I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³ but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

In this life the things we know we should do, need to do – we do not do.

Rather, often we end up doing the exact opposite to what we know is right.

That's how temptation to sin has always worked. --half-truths, assumed truths, rationalized truths become the truth.

Our imperfect and sinful nature is not hidden by the scriptures

Jesus did not teach the fundamental goodness of human nature

Undoubtedly he believed the Old Testament truth that humankind, male and female, were made in

the image of God – but he also believed that this image had been marred

He taught the worth of human beings; not least by devoting himself to their service\ but he also taught our unworthiness.

St. Paul cuts to the chase in the third chapter of his letter to the Romans

²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; (vs23)

It is not a verse given make us feel bad or look bad, But as a reality check – like one of the verses William read this mooring

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (Vs 10)

We are far from perfect people.

We are sinners in the hands of a gracious and merciful God.

John goes on

He does not leave us to wallow in our sins with no way out

No he says that confession of sins is key

Given that the world around us raises its eyes in doubt when the Christian speaks about the universality of sin,

You can imagine the world's reactions to the counsel – “if **we confess our sins**”

Some scene from a movie, book or TV show of a little confessional box in a church where a priest is hearing the confession of a parishioner.

I know historically, the confessional and the practice of confession were open to terrible abuses. However, at least there was an understanding that confession in some form to someone was important!

I grew up in a mainline church in the Reformed tradition

If confession was part of any regular worship service, and in my memory it was not – too Romish for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Welland\ then the minister said the words for all of us

My training in theological college in the late 1970's taught and encouraged the use of unison prayers of confession.

And so every week, there is in the order of service here, a unison prayer of confession

It's generality is the way it must be for a public order of worship – but it is there week by week – not just for filler,\

But to acknowledge that we are sinner

And in order for the Kingdom of God to move forward, sinners need to confess their sins and to hear God's words of forgiveness.

Public worship confession is only the starting point by the way.

I think confession of sins needs to be done daily –
 because the simple truth is that we sin – DAILY
 Think not – then give your head a shake!

You do!

We all do!

For daily confession let me suggest two
 resources.

One is from the older Book of Common Prayer of
 the Episcopalian church.

It is not much different in wording from the ASB of
 the Anglican Church in Canada or the beloved Book
 of Common Prayer of Thomas Cranmer

This is one of those historic prayers of the
 church that expresses so much, so succinctly
 Let me pray it now,

Almighty and most merciful Father,

We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep,

We have followed too much the devices and desires of
 our own hearts,

We have offended against your holy laws,

We have left undone those things which we ought to have
 done,

And we have done those things which we ought not to
 have undone.

But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us,

Spare thou those who confess their faults,

Restore thou those who are penitent,

According to thy promises declared unto mankind in
 Christ Jesus our Lord;

And grant, O merciful Father, for his sake,

That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous and sober life, to the glory of thy holy Name. AMEN

The other resource is the Examen – a Jesuit spiritual exercise outlined in this book – that we have given to many parents at the time of their child’s baptism. Each day end by asking two questions:

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

When today did I have the greatest sense of belonging to myself, others, God and the universe?

When did I have the least sense of belonging?

The Battle with personal sinfulness and corporate sinfulness will be ever with each of us.

Whether we admit this to be the case or not is immaterial.

Sin is with us.

We can try to rationalize it away,

Blame others,

Not accept responsibility,

Omit it from our public language – it matters not – it is still with us!

Do you know in 1863, at the grimmest moment in the American Civil War, and then President Abraham Lincoln called Americans to a National Day of Prayer.

In his proclamation, Lincoln uses the word 'sin' and calls the nation to repent of its sin and turn back to God.

100 years pass

In the early 1950' s the American Congress passed a law that the president should henceforth and every year designates a certain day in May as a National Day of Prayer.

Then President Eisenhower in the first year borrowed much of the language of Lincoln's 1863 address – including the use of the word 'sin'.

In all succeeding years, Eisenhower left the word 'sin' out.

No president since then has used the word 'sin' in his proclamation

Pride, self-righteousness, short comings, mistakes, but no call for the people to repent of their sins!

Just because we do not use the word, run away from it as a description of action and behaviour, hide from it, does not mean it ceases to exist.

It exists and John to his readers –then and now
 --face up to the reality that ALL of us are sinners
 --face up to the reality of how crucial it is to confess those sins

To not do so is to make God a liar – and do any of us; really, I mean really want to do that? AMEN