

ORTHODOXY: *The Forgiven Life* - week 4

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presbyterian Church of Newton, KS - Feb. 2, 2020

Today we're going to talk about "*the forgiveness of sins*" portion of the Apostle's Creed, which means we also have to talk about sin, and I haven't been able to figure out how to write a fun sermon about sin. I know what you're thinking, "Sermons about sin aren't supposed to be fun."

OK. If you're thinking that, then you're with me. Sin isn't an enjoyable topic, it's tragic really, so sermons about sin shouldn't be fun, but maybe the sermon should still be enjoyable. So to make it more enjoyable, I have for you a Top 5 list of stupid criminals and their crimes. These are subjective of course, but here goes.

- 1. The Robber who tried to rob a bank that had already closed**
- 2. The Robber who called to see if there was money in the cash register before he robbed the store**
- 3. The Robber who tripped and stabbed himself with the knives he was stealing**
- 4. The Robber who drove a stolen car to court**
- 5. The Robber who broke into the home of an Olympic fencing champion. *That'll leave a mark!***

The Scripture we're looking at this morning is from Romans chapter 3 and it has the sub-title of "No One is Righteous" in the NIV. The Message paraphrase calls this section: "We're All In the Same Sinking Boat". The Apostle

Paul is writing to fellow Jews who are following Jesus and he pretty much lays it all out there: we all sin.

Romans 3:10-11 TNIV

No One Is Righteous

“There is no one righteous, not even one;

¹¹ there is no one who understands;

there is no one who seeks God.

Romans 3:9-20 Message paraphrase

We're All in the Same Sinking Boat

⁹⁻²⁰ So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others? Not really. Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it:

There's nobody living right, not even one,

nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for God.

They've all taken the wrong turn;

they've all wandered down blind alleys.

No one's living right;

I can't find a single one.

Their throats are gaping graves,

their tongues slick as mudslides.

Every word they speak is tinged with poison.

They open their mouths and pollute the air.

They race for the honor of sinner-of-the-year,

litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,

Don't know the first thing about living with others.

They never give God the time of day.

Sometimes when I watch the news, I think the people on tv are *“racing for the honor of sinner of the year.”* *“They don’t know the first thing about living with others.”*

Something has fundamentally gone wrong, if we have to see these events each night on the evening news. I think sin explains them. But then some people take sort of an intellectual offense to the idea of sin, or being called a sinner. They prefer concepts of science, like DNA, or theories of evolution like “survival of the fittest.” While I find DNA and adapting to one’s environment helpful for understanding human action, I also find truth in what the Apostle Paul wrote, “No one is righteous.”

In the Old Testament, they had an elaborate sacrificial system for getting these Do Over’s. They had a ram for this sin and a goat for that, a bird for this, and so on. But the sad thing was, they had to do these sacrifices every year. Because they never really worked.

In the New Testament in the book of Hebrews we read about the actual purpose God had for this sacrificial system. Hebrews 10:3 says that, **“...instead of removing awareness of sin, when those animal sacrifices were repeated over and over they actually heightened awareness and guilt.”** It was a reminder that they still needed forgiveness.

Now let’s look at an example of God’s response to sin and shame in John 8:1-11. Here is the story. Jesus has been teaching in a courtyard, when he is interrupted. An angry

mob of religious leaders is bringing to him a woman with a bed sheet around her and she's shoved to the ground in front of Jesus. One of the religious leaders barks out the accusation against her saying, **"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery."** John 8:4 (NIV)

"Caught in the act" tells you pretty much everything you need to know, I think. And she doesn't deny it and she doesn't defend herself. She's been found out, she finds herself here in a place where her shame is something she can no longer deny and she's got to deal with it.

Now this seems like that's the worst thing that could happen. Surely, this was her worst nightmare coming true. She's being exposed for what she's done. But consider what happens, and I love this about God, she finds herself closer than ever to Jesus and God's grace. The religious leaders are ready to stone her and we see a glimpse of God's heart for her and us.

Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, **"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."** Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. John 8:6

We don't know what He wrote. What we do know is it was taking the condemning eyes of these religious leaders off of the woman and on to whatever Jesus was doing. I think that's what Jesus was doing.

Jesus, reveals the Father's love for us, when He sees His daughter, sees she is devastated and ashamed; He wants to get their eyes off of her, so Jesus writes on the ground. His defense will come later, but we see the heart of God here.

We are told in another book by the Apostle Paul that Jesus **"who knew no sin became sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."** We who are broken, we who are hurt, we who are sinful can be presented before God as one without blemish or defect. Jesus wants you, just the way you are. But some of you have received an inaccurate, non-biblical picture of the Father.

More than our sin, we need to be fully aware of God's heart for us, when we come to church. Jesus sees this woman in the dirt and He responds to these men and He says to them, **"If any one of you is without sin, you can cast the first stone."** Slowly they drop their stones; they walk away. Jesus is left alone with this woman and Jesus says to her:

"Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:1-11 NIV

Jesus offers her grace. And I want you to see what He does. He offers her grace, but He doesn't ignore the truth of her sin. Right? He doesn't write it off. He doesn't say, *"Hey, look, it's not that big of a deal."* He doesn't say, *"Yes, I know you had a rough childhood and it's not really*

your fault at all.” No, He calls it sin. He asks her to acknowledge it and to leave it behind, and He offers His grace to help her do it. He says, **“Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin.”**

I’m committed to being a part of a church where each and every one of us can truly come as we are, but we don’t have to stay that way. When we receive the words of Jesus, that He came to die for our sins, we are on a collision course with God’s grace. It’s beautiful. And then we need to let go of the past. When you receive forgiveness, then you can let go, no matter how painful. Don’t bring the shame from a past season into this season of your life.

I love the progression we see in Romans. First Paul is telling us no one is righteous, then he shares his struggle with sin in Romans Chapter 7. **“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”** There is this heart felt repentance from Paul and then in Romans 8:1 he says, **“There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”**

He talked about being set free from the Law of Sin and Death: No more guilt. You know, I don’t know of a sin, past, present or future that can keep us from Jesus and the Father’s love. God has this habit, this “bad habit” you might say, of taking bad people and giving them a good future. The Bible says, **For I know the plans I have for you,”**

declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV).

The truth is that God is waiting for us to turn to Him, no matter our sin, and to be released from guilt and shame. The result is we can become new, because of Jesus. If there's one thing I want to speak most about at First Presbyterian it's finding our identities in Jesus and the Father's love. As a Christian, your past is not your identity anymore. If you've set your faith in Jesus, you are a new creation, the old has gone the new has come.