

“Taking Sin Seriously”

Date: March 7, 2016

Place: Lakewood UMC

Occasion: Series, 7 Deadly Sins

Theme: Sin

Texts: Romans 7:14-25

Last Sunday we finished up our series on Stewardship. Today we begin a new series entitled “The Seven Deadly Sins.” Do you know what they are? Would you be willing to take a guess – what are the seven deadly sins? (they are: pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, lust and gluttony)

The idea of listing the major sins is almost as old as Christianity itself. It seems to have begun with the desert fathers in Egypt. In the sixth century, though, Pope Gregory the Great finalized the list that we now use.

Sin is simply what separates us from God. The drama of the human race began with two people, Adam and Eve. Yes, the sin problem is that old. Made in the image of God, the first people are sinless. They’re placed in a garden of paradise unspoiled by evil.

They are given free choice. Given the choice between paradise and the forbidden fruit, our ancestors chose to rebel against God. Whether you take the Garden of Eden story literally or not, there is truth. Humanity, even though made in the image of God, has an irresistible urge to go its own way.

Adam and Eve represent you and me. There is a sense in which they are every person. Their experience is universal. There is a force at work inside each human being that impels us to put ourselves first. Deep within us, something so crafty that we can’t

even identify it, is the urge to put ourselves where God should be – as the captain of our soul.

Ever since Adam and Eve, that has been the predicament of the human race. We are creatures made to live in holy communion with God, but instead we live in rebellion against God's divine purpose. We are fallen beings who no longer reflect the divine image in which we were made. Sin has distorted the world.

Today among most people, the concept of sin seems antiquated, a quaint idea but hardly worth paying attention to. Instead, we have redefined our problems as psychological in nature, or evidence of a poor upbringing.

Since the age of the Enlightenment we have come to believe that if we could just educate people we could help them to solve their own problems. We've tried to get the government to change people's behaviors. We've tried spending billions of dollars on correcting the problems of society. And still the problems persist.

In the early 1970's, the noted psychiatrist Karl Menninger wrote a book entitled *Whatever Became of Sin?* In his book, Dr. Menninger urged us not to write off all of the unpleasant behavior of people as simply a psychological maladjustment. A secular psychiatrist was making the clarion call to take sin seriously.

Theologians and preachers have been making that case for centuries. But getting people to take sin seriously is an uphill battle. Our biggest obstacle is a thing called denial. We prefer not to think of ourselves as sinners. It's a term that seems too harsh; it applies to someone else but not to us. We are simply nice people who run out of bounds occasionally, or sometimes make mistakes.

But which one of us would like to have the uncensored video of our life shown on a screen for the entire world to see? What if every thought, every word you ever spoke, every action you ever did was played on a screen for all to see? Who could tolerate seeing the unedited version of our life on display for all to watch?

Quite naturally people avoid revealing their sins; we want to keep them a secret. One of the consequences of sin is a thing called shame. Adam/ Eve were ashamed of their nakedness after the Fall.

Adam blamed Eve for making him eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. And so, we hide our shame, or we blame it on someone else. We don't want to admit that we're not all that we should be. We pretend to be better than really we. Sin prefers to hide in darkness.

C.S. Lewis, noted Christian author, writes these words: "Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing to say to people, as far as I know, to people who do not know they have anything to repent of, and who do not feel they need forgiveness." He goes on:

"It is only after you have realized that there is a Moral Law and a Power behind the Law, and that you have broken that Law and put yourself wrong with that Power, it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk."

Does that make sense? Unless you recognize and know that you're a sinner, unless you understand that God expects us to live in a certain way and you realize you have not lived according to God's Way, nobody believes they have need of being forgiven.

Forgiven of what? That's what we're going to look at this Lent. Beginning with the sermon on Ash Wednesday, when we examine

the sin known as *pride*, we will systematically look at these seven deadly sins. These are the most common sins, the deadly ones, the ones that keep tripping us up over and over again: pride, envy, anger, sloth, lust, greed and gluttony.

We swear that we'll never do them again, and then we find ourselves doing the very thing we swore we'd never do again. We make promises to God. We promise to better people, and then we find it's not so easy to be the person we want to be.

And we wonder, 'what's wrong with *me*?' The human predicament is that we're all sinners. Romans 3:23 describes our condition: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The answer, that we Christians have come to know and believe, is found in Jesus Christ.

The cross of Jesus Christ saves us in two ways. First, the punishment for our sin, the punishment that we deserved, was taken away. Jesus died in our place. His death has atoning power, to take away the burden of our sin. By faith, we accept God's pardon. Our sins are forgiven; our souls washed clean; we are pardoned.

There is a second way in which the cross of Christ saves us. The grace of Christ comes to us not only as pardon but also as power. When we come to the place where we realize *we can't stop sinning*, then we turn our lives over to Jesus.

And He begins to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. The theological word for it is called sanctification; the Holy Spirit comes to help us. Our job is to surrender and say to God, "Lord, I'm a sinner and I need your help. Here is the sin that keeps getting me into trouble. Help me Lord to avoid the evil I hate. Be my strength."

This morning we will receive the sacrament of Holy Communion. We come as broken sinners, in need of grace. Not out of our holiness, but out of our brokenness we come to this table, seeking the grace of Jesus Christ.

No matter what your sin, no matter what you've done, there is grace and forgiveness. But Jesus can't forgive what you won't confess and surrender to Him. Come to the table, confess your sin, and ask Jesus to give you new life.

With God's help we can have new life and become a new person. Our debts have been paid; our iniquity has been wiped away. Come to the table, eat the bread and drink the juice, and be born again into a new person, through the grace of Jesus Christ. Amen.