

We believe in the forgiveness of sins.... Readings: Isaiah 6:1-6, James 5:13-16, Luke 7:36-50

As we continue to work through the Apostles Creed, we come to “We believe in the forgiveness of sins”. Last week as Susan spoke about the church she mentioned the crossovers between the two statements and I can’t help but also touch on some areas also.

Although each of these statements of faith are crucial and equally important, this I think is the one where we have a bigger role than only believing. This is the one that hurts the most because in order to believe this first we must swallow our pride and admit we are sinners!

As I reflected on Susan’s sermon last week and the fact that we are called to be in the world but not be a part of it, along with the events this last week as I prepared for this sermon I felt compelled to compare the world view of sin to that of the church.

How does the world view sin?

Generally sin is seen as a “guilty pleasure”, something desirable. I remember as a kid growing up in England chocolate mousse adverts depicting the product as sinfully good! Or take a walk down Queen Street and you will find a shop called sinful coffee.....

So according to this world view The Church is a spoil sport, a stick in the mud, and Christianity is like a prison that represses freedom.

On Friday I was sent to clean a carpet in Nelson, when I walked in, I was greeted by just that accusation of oppression; the walls in the house was were covered with anti-Christian, anti-religion, and particularly fascinating to me a derogatory statements about the Apostle Paul, centre piece was a gay pride flag which its self was covered in calls for freedom.

What I have just described is a view I held myself! The very fact that I am up here preaching on sin in Anglican Church would have been unthinkable to me, on Christmas Eve 2000 the year before Lorna and I were married; we for some reason attended the midnight service at Nelson cathedral and when I saw the liturgy declaring all to be sinners I was outraged! I could only endure so much and so got up deliberately in order to show my disgust and walked out, and

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seeing my courage was followed out by others equally incensed (I was so proud not only was I liberated but I had also liberated them!).

The righteousness of God is something we tend to shy away from often now in the church with fear of offending someone, but as Susan also alluded to last week sometimes love is corrective and quite often not something we all to hear

It wasn't until God revealed himself to me as we heard the reading from Isaiah 6, that I saw the Holiness of God and therefore the sinfulness of myself (or at least in part). I can only imagine what it must have been like for Isaiah to see the fullness of God! For me He was a little gentler. I prayed to God that I realised that I was a sinner and would He please forgive me and come and dwell inside of me.... My life did instantly change and God removed from me certain stuff that I no longer had any desire for...

My understanding was simplistic though and naively I believed that now I was forgiven I could make it on my own, and live in a fitting manner for God. I became just as bigger hypocrite as the Pharisees, as I couldn't be perfect I thought I should make people think that I am perfect.. and shun those in the church who show themselves to be less than perfect.....

My understanding of sin was still worldly and I thought that by denying myself of guilty pleasure, this was somehow pleasing to God..... I thought my salvation was faith plus works....

So what about the way the church views sin?

I think King David summed it up brilliantly when he had had an affair with a married woman (Bathsheba) who became pregnant, so he tried to cover it up which eventually lead to him having Bathsheba's husband murdered. When he was confronted by Nathan God's profit, he repented and God forgave him, but as he came to terms with his actions he wrote Psalm 51 and in it declared "in sin did my mother conceive me"

David had realised he was born a sinner, and sin is not just when we do something bad it is our very nature to do so. I think it was Tim Keller

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(Presbyterian Theologian) who said you don't need to teach kids how to lie... They instinctively know how to do it! He also points out that people are capable of committing the most hideous of crimes when the right sequence of events falls into place.

I've come to understand sin as a Virus that I am infected with and so are you!

God's forgiveness

In 2014 I had a really hard time believing I was forgiven! I had a very deep depression and somehow I stumbled upon a book by John Bunyan titled "Grace abounding to the chief of sinners" if it wasn't for the fact it was written in old English, I could have sworn as I read through Bunyan's struggles I had written it myself. It was actually when Kevin and Anne were visiting us that I was not planning on attending Church, but Lorna got a word from God saying we should come. They preached on healing and as I stepped up to Kevin as he invited us for prayer, I said nothing to him (I had never met him), he instantly put his hand on my heart and prayed Father, fill this man's heart with the knowledge of your love for him. I instantly felt what I could only describe as a bolt of electricity, suddenly God's love was very real and I was healed.

Susan spoke a few weeks ago and said that God wanted you to be you, and not try to be like anyone else.... A few months ago I realised I was having an identity crisis, it was very real and I really didn't know who Tom was.....

What I realised is that the opposite of the world view is in fact true regarding sin... whereas the world believes that Christianity seeks to imprison us, Jesus words in John chapter 8 are the reality (He whom the Son sets free is free in deed).

I could preach for another hour or so on this alone! But now I accepted that freedom I don't need to be held imprisoned any longer, and now each day I am discovering who the Tom is that God created me to be, that is not to say that I am without sin just not held down by it any longer.

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Last week Susan asked what was the church for? As I have pondered this along with putting this sermon together I have realised just as we heard in our readings we are to confess our sins to each other, and pray for the forgiveness of our brothers and sisters... If we were to recognise we are all infected with the same disease then we could no longer serve as judge, but have compassion on our fellow sufferers. Instead of hiding our sins we should readily confess them and keep each other accountable. Perhaps then we would also have more compassion on the world just as Jesus did on the prostitute.