

PENTECOST 3

Proper 5 - Year B

Note: During the 2024 Season after Pentecost, Sermons That Work will use Track 2 readings for sermons and Bible studies. Please consult our archives for many additional Track 1 resources from prior years.

Genesis 3:8-15

⁸They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” ¹⁴The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

“Sin” can be a difficult word for Episcopalians (and, to be fair, everyone else). For any number of reasons, we shrink from using the word. Is it because it feels antiquated or judgmental? Is it because the word has been used to harm us or those we love? Is it because we question whether people are actually culpable for their actions in a world with powerful and competing systems? It’s probably the case that all of these things are true, but avoidance of the concept isn’t a good option for Christians – instead, we ought to delve into the text and pray for illumination from the Holy Spirit.

Our first reading describes one of the first sins – a sign of the many troubles to come. Adam and Eve, having succumbed to temptation, hide themselves from God, ashamed of their nakedness. As we read, we find the results of their sin: shame, fear, separation, blame, enmity. The picture is bleak, but we are not without hope.

Discussion Questions

Do you have trouble using the word or concept of “sin”? Why or why not?

Psalm 130

- 1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice; *
let your ears consider well the voice of my
supplication.
- 2 If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, *
O Lord, who could stand?
- 3 For there is forgiveness with you; *
therefore you shall be feared.
- 4 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; *
in his word is my hope.
- 5 My soul waits for the Lord,
more than watchmen for the morning, *
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 6 O Israel, wait for the Lord, *
for with the Lord there is mercy;
- 7 With him there is plenteous redemption, *
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

While the first few verses of the psalm may seem dour – the writer calling out from the very depths! – the overarching theme here is one of forgiveness of sins. As we saw in the reading from Genesis, sin distorts things, maybe feeling momentarily good, but ultimately leading to deeply miserable places. But hope remains – the psalmist knows that God forgives and redeems, which is good because our first ancestors didn't have a monopoly on messing up. Indeed, *nobody* (with a single, notable exception) could stand justified before God without forgiveness and mercy. Sin afflicts all of us, leading us to lonely, humiliating places, but God promises that we need not stay there.

Discussion Questions

How does it feel to know that you've done wrong? What physical and mental differences do you notice in yourself as a result of shame or guilt?

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

¹³ But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and therefore we also speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and will present us with you in his presence. ¹⁵ Indeed, everything is for your sake, so that grace, when it has extended to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our slight, momentary affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5 For we know that, if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Commentary from Sermons That Work

While sin isn't addressed in a direct way in this reading, Paul provides helpful descriptions of what we are promised by God at the end of our earthly sojourn: Resurrection. Grace. A renewed inner nature. An eternal weight of glory. An indestructible home – forever. These come to us not because we've done a very good job of being humans – in fact, they don't come to us because of *our* actions at all! Not, they come because God keeps reaching them out to us because God is gracious indeed. All we need do is turn back toward him, toward his outstretched hand.

Discussion Questions

Does the Good News ever seem too good?
Claiming it may be simple, but is it easy?

Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, “He has gone out of his mind.” ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.” ²³ And he called them to him and spoke to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ “Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin”— ³⁰ for they had said, “He has an unclean spirit.”

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you.” ³³ And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Commentary from Sermons That Work

Back on the theme of discomfort: This is a shocking teaching from Jesus, and one that we must seek to understand well – the stakes are high. There is one sin, says our Lord, that will not be forgiven: equating the spirit of Satan and the Holy Spirit. Much has been written of the “eternal sin,” as it is often called, and we encourage you to read interpretations from across Christian history.

Setting it aside momentarily, though, there is another important, related side of this teaching, too: that *every other misstep, every other malicious action, every other action that keeps us awake at night is forgivable by the God who made us*. That is, our God *promises* mercy for any other action. Jesus Christ longs to gather us in, calling us his brothers, sisters, and mothers.

Discussion Questions

Do these strike you as hard words to hear from Jesus? Why or why not?

Search for interpretations of the eternal sin. Do any of these theories help you make sense of the teaching?