

Anchored in the Storm

Message #3 – “Imago Dei: Sin and Savior”
Genesis 3:15; Romans 5:12-17; Galatians 4:4-7
St. Paul’s United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown
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Welcome once again to St. Paul’s United Methodist Church. My name is Matt Skillen and I am one of the pastors here. We are so blessed you have joined us for this worship service through the written word. Our prayer is that the presence of God is with you, wherever you are right now.

We are in the midst of a new sermon series in the new year we are calling “Anchored in the Storm.” We’re going all the way back to the beginning of the Bible to explore the very presence of God in creation and the establishing of His covenants with his people. The central focus of this message series, just as it should be for every moment of life, is Jesus. The foundation and focal point of our lives as Christians is Jesus Christ—the only Son of God and the Savior from sin. No matter the circumstances or situation, the conditions or consequences we are living through, Christ is our anchor in the chaos of life.

**No matter the storm. He is our anchor.
No matter the course, he is our navigator.**

As we start our message today, I am thinking of a very specific time and place, and I’d like to take you there with me. Ready? Imagine with me, if you will, a time and place where there are no coronaviruses. There are no arbitrary gathering mandates; there are no masks. That sounds really amazing, doesn’t it? I am not asking you to go back with me only to February 2020. The place I am thinking of is the Garden of Eden.

The Garden, as we saw last week in Pastor David’s sermon is the remarkable setting that we see described in the beginning of Genesis. It is the epicenter of creation where God brought the world, his creation, to life. God created everything for Adam, including a mate named Eve. Together, they were given great authority of these amazing things God created. With this remarkable Purpose and Permission given to Adam and Eve, God had created order out of the chaos and void that was once present. However, and there is always an “however,” the order became disordered when Adam and Eve decided to do things their own way, to cross the one boundary that had been set for them, to break the commandment God had delivered. They ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Sin and brokenness had come to the world—not just to Adam and Eve, but to all of creation.

¹⁴*The 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.*

¹⁵*I 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."*
(Genesis 3:14-15)

God's judgment is swift. He explains to Adam and Eve that things are going to change rather dramatically. They would work and toil to survive in the wilderness. Childrearing would become arduous and difficult. Strife, pain and hostility would exist between them. This would no longer be a walk in the park. But the disorder created by Adam and Eve would not just exist between them. It would infect and impact all that God created. No more would there be harmony between humans and creation. It was all put into disorder.

**By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil,
Adam brought sin into the entire world.**

That seems pretty remarkable, doesn't it? Just think of the enormity of what we are talking about. One single act of disobedience leads to all manner of sin in the world. All adultery, murder, addiction, abuse and slander. All anger, and hatred, and racism. It all stems from this one moment in creation when Adam and Eve went against a single commandment from God. Sin, the things we do that separate us from God, was brought into the world by one act of disobedience.

¹²⁻¹⁴*You know the story of how Adam landed us in the dilemma we're in—first sin, then death, and no one exempt from either sin or death. That sin disturbed relations with God in everything and everyone, but the extent of the disturbance was not clear until God spelled it out in detail to Moses. So death, this huge abyss separating us from God, dominated the landscape from Adam to Moses. Even those who didn't sin precisely as Adam did by disobeying a specific command of God still had to experience this termination of life, this separation from God. But Adam, who got us into this, also points ahead to the One who will get us out of it. **(Romans 5:12-14 in The Message)***

Sin and then death; that is quite a dilemma. The disorder and chaos that was first unraveled in the Garden now lives on so many generations later. Just look around at what is happening today... look at any point in human history. At every turning point there is disorder and chaos fueling the passions and fears of men, women and children. We have a tendency to look at our present circumstances and say to ourselves, "My goodness, it has never seemed this bad before..." The shock and awe of recent events have certainly caused us all to take stock of what we believe

to be right and true and just. And while all of this appears shocking to us, and it is shocking, none of this, none of it, is a surprise to God. Given the infinite nature of God, I believe he even saw today when he saw Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I also believe he saw you and he saw me and everything that would come to pass.

Sin has a replicating and amplifying effect. And it is seen in a variety of ways. When we sin, we aren't always explicitly defying a direct commandment of God, but we sin nonetheless. And the amplifying nature of sin is seen in chaos and destruction playing on loops over and over again on television or on your social media feed. It's seen in addiction that eats away at the heart. Sin's replicating and amplifying nature can be seen in broken hearts, broken promises and broken families. It can be seen in darkest corners of the worst possible outcome. It can feel like gigantic storm surges and waves crashing on all sides of the hull of a ship, each one crashing is bigger than the one before it. And as the wind whips up faster and faster the small boat that we are all trying to save is being thrown violently from one side to the other, completely lost and out of control.

It is these things that make us feel the most isolated, stranded and overwhelmed and alone, like a storm-tossed boat at sea.

The Apostle Paul refers to sin, that separation from God, as "death" or "termination of life."

If you are adrift, storm-tossed and stranded, you have to know that God hears you. He sees you. And if He could talk to you directly right now He'd say, "Child, no matter where you are, you are found. This world is far too small to contain the love I have for you. Not one entire ocean, not 3,000 oceans, could ever keep you away from me."

Throughout the Biblical story, God has established order from the chaos of sin and brokenness. Time and again, when disorder reached a certain point, God would come and reorder his people back to him. This is why God sent His son Jesus to us. And, as the Apostle Paul puts it in his letter to the Galatian Christians, Jesus's arrival was more than a flash-in-the-pan, it was a complete and permanent reorienting of the whole relationship between God and us.

The apostle Paul writes:

*⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. ⁶And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God **(Galatians 4:4-7)***

We are indeed, children of God, heirs to the Kingdom. No longer are we the sinners adrift in the ocean being pushed and pulled into wave after wave of sin. We are

children of the God all things seen and unseen, of all things past, present and future. We are redeemed, no longer slaves to the sins we have committed, but free.

Paul continues...

*¹⁵⁻¹⁷Yet the rescuing gift is not exactly parallel to the death-dealing sin. If one man's sin put crowds of people at the dead-end abyss of separation from God, just think what God's gift poured through one man, Jesus Christ, will do! There's no comparison between that death-dealing sin and this generous, life-giving gift. The verdict on that one sin was the death sentence; the verdict on the many sins that followed was this wonderful life sentence. If death got the upper hand through one man's wrongdoing, can you imagine the breathtaking recovery life makes, sovereign life, in those who grasp with both hands this wildly extravagant life-gift, this grand setting-everything-right, that the one man Jesus Christ provides? (**Romans 5:15-17** in The Message).*

In answering Paul's question at the end of this passage, I believe we can.

- **I believe we can** understand the life-giving relief we feel when we, "with both hands," take hold of the life-sustaining salvation that comes from the love, grace and peace of Jesus Christ.
- **I believe we can** speak from first-hand experience what it is like to be completely weighed down by depression and dejection.
- **I believe we can** testify to the times when all hope seemed to be lost, when darkness enveloped us, when our hearts feeling as heavy as rocks struggled to beat.
- And, I know there are many of us in this worship service today who can also claim to have been delivered through the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ. We've been there.
- And if you are in Christ you know His healing power.

When the storms of life come, and they will come, we could be out to sea or in a harbor—the storms will find us eventually. I learned this week that when in a violent storm catches a boat in the open water, the boat must turn and face the waves that are coming toward it. If it doesn't make this maneuver in time the waves will capsize the boat. If in the harbor and the wind begins to pick up as a storm rolls in, a skilled boatman will throw the heaviest anchor toward the incoming winds and waves. In both cases, whether out in open water or in the harbor, the boat must face the storm that is approaching it.

No matter where we may be, when chaos and turbulence come, we may want to the very natural thing—avoid it. To try to steer clear of the oncoming waves or to cut loose of our anchor and run as far and as fast as we can the opposite direction of the oncoming storm. **But it turns out the opposite is true for boats and the opposite is true for us.**

Friends, when the storms of life bring chaos and brokenness, we, like the boat at sea, need to turn and face those things that are coming toward us. Let the love and compassion of Christ, and the assurance of his salvation and peace, fortify us

as we turn our ships to face the oncoming waves. Whatever we may confront in the chaos of a storm, we never confront these things on our own. **Jesus is our navigator and he is anchor.**

Jesus has many names in the Biblical story. One of my favorites is “The Tree of Life.” And in the grand symmetry of the Bible story was see how even Adam’s lapse of judgment points us to our salvation.

As Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, bringing sin into the world,

**By eating from the tree of life, we are adopted
into God’s Kingdom for eternity.**

Adam brought a **great** sin into the world...

*God’s love proves to be **greater**.*

While sin creates a **great** distance between us and God,

*God’s desire for us is **greater**.*

When we feel the depth of our disobedience is too **great** to be forgiven,

*God’s grace is **greater**.*

Go with me one more time. Imagine a place where there are no coronaviruses, mandates or masks. There is no violence, vaccines or voting machines. This is a place where racism, dissention, chaos and brokenness are resolved for eternity. They simply don’t exist. A place where there is no pain; there is no mourning; there are no unanswered questions. In this place we are complete. This place is Heaven—the Kingdom of God. While we’ve maybe gotten used to the idea that Heaven is a place that we might see one day, the truth of the matter is the Kingdom of God is here before us even today. It resides in each of you, and it is meant to be shared with one another. As we journey together, let us remember **God’s love is greater**, and it is His love we take with us to share.