

“GIVING UP: III - SIN”
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Third Sunday of Lent

Luke 13:1-9

If you’ve been around here for any length of time at all, you pretty much know how I like to come up with intriguing sermon titles (this current series, notwithstanding!). I always feel like if I can come up with an interesting or intriguing title, you’ll really look forward to what I might say. You’ll try to figure out what I’m going to do with it.

Well, in my opinion, the same thing goes for book titles. I mean, if you’re standing in front of a massive row of books at Barnes and Noble, for example, it’s the books with the interesting, intriguing titles that catch your eye, and make you take down the book and check it out. Well, one of the most intriguing book titles I’ve ever come across is a book written by James Moore, that I’ve used before in sermons. It’s called *Yes Lord, I Have Sinned, But I Have Several Excellent Excuses*.

How’s that for a book title? Actually, that could be a subtitle over today’s gospel lesson, couldn’t it? For that matter, that could be a subtitle over all of society today, couldn’t it?

I mean, we live in a world of excuses, of blaming others, rationalizing our behavior, or hiding what we’ve done. Don’t believe me - why don’t you check out the headlines just this week! All week long, we’ve seen politicians pointing the finger of blame at members of the other party, or politicians in one building pointing the finger of blame on those in another. Nobody wants to take any responsibility for the mess.

And lest we be too quick to let the blame settle there, we need to acknowledge that making excuses and rationalizing and hiding our sins is everywhere.

“I didn’t do that project because my mother didn’t buy the supplies for me.”

“I know the sales clerk gave me way too much change, but hey, they overcharge for their stuff anyway.”

“Yeah, I went out with my co-worker for a drink, but my husband never pays

any attention to me any more.”

“So I cheated a little on my taxes. The government takes too much anyway, and look how they waste it.”

“Sure, I lied to my boss, but it was just a little white lie.”

You see, sin is all around us, even within us. And the art of lying and making excuses for our sinning starts on the very first pages of the Bible. When Adam and Eve are caught after breaking the only rule God gave them, what did they do? Eve blamed the serpent for making them eat the fruit, and Adam went one step further. He blamed not only Eve, but God Himself. For he said, “The woman **you gave me** made me do it.”

So when Jesus had the conversation with the people that we heard about in the Gospel lesson this morning, he knew the kind of people to whom he was talking. People like you and me. He knew that, just like us, they didn’t want to think about sin, particularly their own sin, so they mostly went blissfully on their way either a) not thinking a bit about it, or b) excusing it or rationalizing it.

Well, it was time for them to start thinking about it. What precipitated the conversation was that some Galileans had suffered at the hands of Pilate, and it alarmed the people. They asked Jesus if these Galileans had suffered more because they were worse sinners than others.

When Jesus first said no, I would imagine they exhaled a little bit, but before they could even take another breath Jesus sternly challenged them. “No, they didn’t suffer more because they were worse sinners than others, but let me tell you something - unless you repent, you will perish just like they did.”

Jesus didn’t pull any punches. He laid it on the line for them, and on this Sunday in Lent, I want to suggest that He lays it on the line for us as well. He challenges us to take seriously the sin in our own lives, to think about the effect of our sin on us and on others, and on our relationship with Him. And not only to think about it, but be totally and brutally honest about it, and confess it to Him. For, He says, if we don’t, there will be consequences. There will come a day when it’s too late.

We don’t like to hear that kind of talk. We don’t really like that kind of Jesus, do we?

Yet, that is the word from the Lord this morning. A call to confession, a call to honesty, a call to do it now, because there will come a time when it’s too late.

Why is Jesus doing this? Why is He calling the people, calling us, to task?

Why does he even seem stern or angry about it?

Why? Because He loves them, and He loves us, and He knows what unconfessed sin does to a person. He knows that hiding our sin, rationalizing our behavior, blaming someone else, takes a toll on us. It changes who we are, it changes our relationship with others, and most of us, it separates us from God Himself. It is an unhealthy way to live, and it is not the full and abundant life God wants for us.

I read something very interesting this week about what sin does in our lives, and particularly in our relationship with God. It went like this: "Sin is like mud on a window. God's love and mercy is like the sun trying to shine through to us to light our way, cheer us and give us life. But the mud keeps the sun from shining through the window. The mud stops the rays from reaching us. It doesn't stop God from trying to shine on us but stops us from being able to receive the light of the world. With the tears of repentance, we ask forgiveness, and the mud is washed away. So the reason repenting is so important is because without it we have obstacles between us and God's grace." (On-line, "Lindy Nuggets," Rev. Elizabeth Lee Sei)

So, friends, like a parent with a child who has misbehaved, Jesus calls us to get right. To confess that which we have done, to give it to God, let the mud be washed away, receive the gift of forgiveness, and then embrace the opportunity to begin again.

I know it can be a scary thing - to open your heart, and honestly confess. Too often we let the fear of admitting sin keep us from doing it. We're afraid to admit it to ourselves, we're afraid to admit it to God, and truth be told, we're afraid we can't be forgiven.

So let me tell you a brief story, that I hope will give you the courage to answer Jesus' call to confession today. It's the story of a woman who was hiking with some friends on a wilderness trail on a muddy day, and all of a sudden she slipped, and slid down an embankment. She managed to grab onto a small tree and was hanging on there for dear life. She was terrified, and kept saying to herself in her mind, "Don't let go, don't let go, you're going to die if you do." She was so terrified that she had her eyes clenched tightly shut, and her body was stiff and rigid with fear.

As she hung there, her friends scrambled to help her. They got down below her, and had to try and convince her to let go of the tree. She was holding on to that tree with a death grip for dear life. They kept calling to her, and finally helped her to realize that she was only a few feet off of the ground, and all she had to do was let go, and she could easily slide down to safety. All she had to do was let

go, and it would be okay.

(On-line, "Words to Live By: Confession," Carol Penner)

Friends, I think those are the words with which Jesus calls us today: "Let go. It will be okay. Let go of your sin. Let go of your fear. Confess, be honest, take it to God, it will be okay. I'm here. I will save you. It will be okay. Let go."

So today, may this be the day you and I let go of our unconfessed sin. When you come to communion, and you kneel in prayer, be honest with Jesus and lay down the burden of your sin, so that He can pick you up and put you back on your feet again, as a new and forgiven person, to live the life He wants for you.

Do not be afraid. All you have to do is let go, and God will be there to catch you. May it be so.

Amen.