

The Holy Spirit Convicts the World of Sin

This Sunday's texts:

[Genesis 1:26-2:4a](#)

[Romans 3:9-24](#)

[Matthew 28:16-20](#)

Pastor Jim Cords

June 4, 2023

The Holy Gospel for this Sunday comes to us from the Gospel of Matthew, the 28th chapter, known as the Great Commission:

¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw Him they worshiped Him; but some doubted.

¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the very end of the age."

The Gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Father, open our hearts to the Good News of the Gospel. Open our hearts to the prompting of your Holy Spirit. Give us the knowledge of Your love and the courage to follow where You lead. In Jesus' name. Amen

Our journey in this theme of *Living with the Spirit's Presence* is going to begin with a journey through Romans over the next several weeks. So if you want to be thinking about, get your mind and heart around the themes that we're looking at, I want to I want to just lay one thing out for you. That is that we're not going to try to wedge the Holy Spirit and doctrine of the Holy Spirit into Paul's letter to the Romans, rather we're going to try to see in Paul's letter to the Romans the implications of the presence of the Holy Spirit that guided the Church in its day. I'm looking forward to the journey. Joe and I have discussed it and we're ready to move forward in it.

The journey starts today in a place that is often one of the most uncomfortable places in all of scripture and that is sin. But let's back up just a moment, shall we? Let's remember the beginning. Let's remember that in the beginning as God created the heavens and the earth, each day as He came to the end of creation, He said, "It is good."¹ When finally He was finished at the end of that sixth day, He said, "It is very good."² I guess I'll be honest and say that there are times in my Christian life, in my journey of faith, when I've longed for the purity and the goodness of creation.

As I've thought about that more recently, one of the disturbing questions that I just haven't quite been able to fully come together with is this question. Which is better - the creation prior to the Fall or the redeemed creation in Christ? I was talking to my son the other day about scar tissue and he mentioned the fact that the place

¹ Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 20, 25

² Genesis 1:31

where scars grow together is usually stronger than the skin that has no scar. I was doing some woodwork thinking and realized that sometimes when you glue a piece of wood together, the wood will break before the place where the wood is glued will break. Interesting. Might God's creation be better because of the Redemption we have in Christ Jesus? I want to suggest to you, indeed, it will be. Not that it is, but that it will be.

There's another interesting dimension of this story of Creation that stuck out to me as I looked at it this week. I'm trying to wrap my head around this and how it fits the flow of everything else that comes. "Then God said, 'Let Us make mankind in Our image, in Our likeness, [and get this] so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over livestock and all the wild animals.'"³ I think I missed the purpose statement, that purpose clause in the verse before. I thought about being created in the image of God. I thought about having dominion over the earth. But what I didn't think about is that we were made in His image, **so that** we could rule, **so that we** could have dominion.

So I started to think again. What is this image of God created in us? Is it power? God created out of power. Did He put power in us? Is that why we have dominion over the earth? Because we have enough power to do it? Let me suggest that it just might be *love*, that it might be the image of God created in us is an ability to love and care for things beyond ourselves, or even above ourselves. And that is how we care for things that we're responsible for. To have dominion, to rule over isn't to trample. It isn't to abuse. It isn't to misuse. It's rather to care for, to elevate, to provide for. Is it possible the image of God in us is seen in our ability to love and care for one another? And, therefore, is it also possible that one of the great tragedies of the Fall - it comes in just that next chapter of Creation - is a brokenness in our ability to love and care for others, is a preoccupation with self, being in control and getting what I want and doing what I want? Is it possible that sin might be rooted in this area of self-centeredness?

Another thought that I've just been spinning on this week is that I'm not sure how this really fits, but I started to ask myself this question. Is it possible that most of the time if my information is all of the accurate information about a subject that I would most often be right? That is, when I'm wrong, is it possible that usually when I'm wrong it's because I don't know something or I fail to consider something or my experience has been inadequate? So that it's when someone else comes with more information or more accurate information that it dawns on me, "Oops, I made a mistake because I didn't have all the knowledge I needed to discern the truth." Well,

³ Genesis 1:26

let me suggest that in my mulling that over I think that's partially right but probably not completely. I think sometimes I do the wrong math not because I have the wrong numbers, if you're tracking with me. What I want to suggest to you is this so often we are convinced we are right because of what we know having failed to consider what we don't know. Or as sometimes they say, maybe that's because we don't know what we don't know and we live in ignorance.

So this lack of God-centeredness leads to this place of self-centeredness. Or let me say it another way. When we recognize and give God His rightful place, then we understand that our rightful place is to live in submission and service to that one holy God. So sin is often when we dethrone God and put our own desires on that throne for our daily lives. As you can tell, we're starting to talk today about sin.

As we journey through Romans, there's this powerful reality in Romans that starts with Paul making this very clear and strong point that the Jews are just doing backflips and celebrating over and that is that those Gentiles are sinners. If I could say that with a little more scum coming out in the tone, it would probably be good because that was the attitude that Jews often had toward Gentiles. The insiders, God's people, were the holy ones and those other people were sinners. And then Paul just twists it just so dramatically in the second chapter of Romans, when he says to the Jews "Oh, oh, you too. You're no better." Then we come to chapter 3 of Romans where we hear that truth "for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."⁴

So what is this sin? It's interesting. Sometimes when you're talking about Grace and salvation, someone will ask this question or at least I've heard this many times in my life. Well, what if Adolf Hitler on his deathbed received Christ? Would he be forgiven? It's this sort of philosophical question that's trying to ask. The worst sinner we can think of, could God really forgive them? Maybe it's because if He could, then maybe He could forgive me too. There's that sense of which we want to find the limit to God's grace.

Let me suggest that when we're thinking about sin, we shouldn't just be thinking about the worst sins that have ever happened. We should be thinking about *hamartia*, which means to miss the mark. It doesn't mean to be black when it's white. It doesn't mean to be going north when we should be going south. It means we miss the point. We miss the bullseye. We need to be set right in the truth and in the will of God who is indeed God. So in missing the mark then, we can recognize that we've all sinned and fallen short. I don't think any of you are wanting to debate, but if you do, we can talk at the coffee machine out in the courtyard between services, if you want

⁴ Romans 3:25

to make the case for never having missed the mark in your life. But I got a feeling that I won't have any takers.

Then some of us, and we, Lutherans are particularly good at it, find ourselves dwelling in sin, dwelling in the reality of the fact that we've missed. And maybe we're not even dwelling in sin. Maybe instead we're dwelling in guilt. You may be thinking to yourself I wish I hadn't come to church today because I really don't want to think about this. Pastor, couldn't you have picked a better subject? Couldn't you have stuck with the first two or three chapters of Genesis? We can talk about all the goodness and beauty of God's creation and not the reality of sin, not the reality of our lives.

So let's be clear. Any thought, word, desire, action, or omission of action contrary to the Law of God or defective when compared with it is sin. Hebrews puts it this way. Anything done without faith is sin.⁵ That's kind of putting it out there. So you see now as we're talking about sin, we've got two cliffs. We got the one cliff where we think about the worst of the worst, those unimaginable sins. And when I say unimaginable, I mean we can't imagine ourselves doing it. We've seen somebody else. Those are the really bad people and I'm not like them. Or we go to the other end to say if I sneeze and don't say *gesundheit*, then I'm a sinner. If I didn't learn to cover my mouth this way [cover it with the inside of my elbow] instead of this way [cover it with my hand], I'm a sinner. Then we start naming things that we think of as inconsequential and then we start to think that sin doesn't matter, if it's inconsequential. It's okay if it's a white lie. It's okay if I'm just a little late. It's okay if I only do half the job. Someone else will step up. Someone else will take care of it. We start making excuses for missing the mark. We start making excuses for falling short, instead of hearing the voice of God.

Listen again. "There is no difference between Jews or Gentiles [there's no difference between me and you; there's no difference between you and your neighbor] for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."⁶ Okay, now we understand the reality. What's the answer? How do we move, not only today, but every day to living a lifestyle of Grace? How do we come to experience the power of the Resurrection to free us from bondage to sin? How do we come to that place where we recognize that today, this very day, the spirit of God lives with me because I have been set free through the blood of Christ? My sin is forgiven, my guilt is forgiven and I can live in the new reality of God's promise and presence this day.

It doesn't mean sin didn't matter. In fact, it means sin really does matter. But God's desire is to set us free from that sin and guilt that crushes us and holds us back, even though it is a reality in our daily life.

⁵ Hebrews 11:6, but more closely, Romans 14:23

⁶ Romans 3:22-23

What does baptism mean for daily living? It means that day after day, we should repent and be renewed in the life that God gives us. The Holy Spirit, one of the roles of that Presence in our lives is to convict the world of sin, to help us to see when we miss the mark, to help us to know when it's time to recalibrate and set our hearts aright on our God, seeking to do what He would want us to do in our lives, seeking to recognize that He is God and we are not, seeking to experience the incredible honor and glory of what it means to be children of the Living God. What an amazing privilege to live in the world, being bearers of Christ, in our forgiveness, in God's grace, in God's presence!

Then there are these very familiar words to those of us at this service. "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."⁷ So a part of what we do in sin is not wallow it, not wallow in its guilt, but simply acknowledge it, so that we can fully receive the Grace God gives us in our Savior. We want to experience the joy of being God's forgiven people, not the burden of recognizing that we are sinners and guilty. We want to hear in the call to repentance a call to life, a call to experience the goodness of God, the love of God, rather than look in the mirror and say "Who could love that?" By the way, do any of you not like your picture taken? Amen! Thank you, Tim [Stahlke]. Appreciate that. You see every wrinkle, don't you? Every extra little flap. I mean it's just terrible. It just reminds us of what we don't like about ourselves. We don't see the bright smile. We don't see the bright eyes. We don't see the lovely people around us. All we see is that one wrinkle, but where's my Photoshop when I need it?

God invites us to experience the joy of repentance by convicting us of sin, so that we come back to the feet of Jesus. Let me say that a different way because when I say come back to the feet of Jesus, it seems like this sort of negative thing where I'm bowed down and bent over and overburdened. Let me suggest another thing. Let me suggest that the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, so that we can enter into the embrace of our Savior, the love, the care, the provision, the family, the body of Christ that we're invited into as God's forgiven people. The call to repentance isn't a call for you to feel bad. In fact, it's an invitation for you to feel free, for you to feel connected, for you to feel like you're a part of the body of Christ, for you to recognize that yes, in fact, God has chosen for His Holy Spirit to live in you and in your life, to open up the beauty of God's creation, to empower you to be set free from sin, to empower you to love and shine with the image of God at work in you. Can you do it? No. Can He do it? Without a doubt, and so we recognize the goodness of God.

⁷1 John 1:8, but also found in "Brief Order for Confession and Forgiveness," *Lutheran Book of Worship*

This is an interesting phrase. I thought it was particularly interesting with this image because it's that hamartia, aiming at the bullseye thing. The words are this: "Be ashamed when you sin. Do not be ashamed when you repent."⁸ Be ashamed when you sin, but then let it go when you repent. Recognize that you're a sinner when you come forward to the altar today, but dance back to the pew when you recognize that you're forgiven because of the blood of Jesus, that it's all wiped away, not only in you, but between you and God, and between you and your brothers and sisters in Christ.



We are free to be the body of Christ, in the Grace of Jesus Christ, through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Amen! That's good news! We want to hear in the reality of sin, the good news of God's rescue, the good news of God's love that overcomes our sin, the good news that God is able to cause all things to work together for good in our lives. So our trust is in the power and the presence, especially in our relationships with God himself.

Listen again to this incredible verse in Romans and let's make sure we don't miss the connecting phrase. Here it is again in verse 23: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," but what does it continue with in verse 24? "And all are justified freely by His Grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Don't hear this proclamation that all have sinned and skip the proclamation that through Jesus, we're all forgiven; we're all set free from that sin. Let's live in the freedom and the love and the goodness of God. Let's invite others to hear that Word of redemption, rather than the guilt and the sorrow and the hardship that sin brings. Brothers and sisters in Christ, you live with the presence of the Holy Spirit because God's Grace has been poured out upon you and made you His own. Thanks be to God. Amen.

⁸ St. John Chrysostom