

Romans 5:12-21
Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place
WRCoB 5.14.23

One of the things Kevin and I talked about
In this past week's Weekly Talk
Was that the language of Christianity is dead.

If it isn't dead, it certainly is dying.

Why?

As Buechner once said,

Through centuries of handling and mishandling [words] have tended to become such empty banalities, that just the mention of them is apt to turn people's minds off like a switch.

Justification, sanctification, eschatology, sin
Redemption, atonement, premillennialism

Words that were once so important
We barely have the energy
To try and understand what they mean.

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I don't use them much.
I try to say the same thing without them.

But truth be known
I still embrace their meanings
And seek to convey them in my preaching.

Take for instance, sin.

Use the word only if you want someone to think of you
As a whacked-out religious nut.

In fact, the word sin is so seldom used
The Oxford Junior Dictionary dropped it

They also dropped the words disciple, minister, and devil.

Even in church, some preachers
Are reluctant to use the word, sin.

It turns people off!

However, having said that
Something does seem wrong in the heart of humanity.

There's stuff within each of us
That prevents us from leading meaningful lives.

Ann Lamott describes it with words other than sin.

Everyone is screwed up, broken, clingy and scared, even the people who seem to have it most together. They are much more like you than you would believe, so try not to compare your insides to other people's outsides. It will only make you worse than you already are.

St Augustine, an early church father
Identifies the human condition
In a more elegant fashion

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.”

Our lives were meant to be lived in the fullness of God.

But along the way, we’ve become estranged from God

We feel we’ve been kicked out of the Garden of Eden.

Or to put it another way, we leave our mother’s womb
And spend the rest of our lives trying to return.

The Apostle Paul describes it
As being stuck between sin, on one hand
And death on the other.

Romans 5:12 CEB Just as through one human being sin came into the world, and death came through sin, so death has come to everyone, since everyone has sinned.

The human condition is just this
We’re caught between a rock and a hard place!

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Many years back
Bill Moyers produced the PBS special
Entitled *Genesis*.

He interviewed panelists from diverse backgrounds.

They conversed about the Fall of Humanity
As stated in Genesis

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God
And consequently, ejected from the Garden of Eden.

Many panelists tiptoed around the word, sin

However, the bestselling novelist Mary Gordon
Got sick of all the political correctness.

Frustrated she finally spoke out.

*People just aren't right. There is something fundamentally
wrong with us that we cannot fix ourselves.*

We're stuck between the longing to be complete and whole
And a life broken and alienated from God.

We're stuck longing to live in Paradise.
But, in real time, living as exiles.

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**Romans 5:12 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.**

Adam and Eve, the first man and first woman
Who also represents every man and woman
Were cast out of the Garden
To live lives exiled from home

We too, experience the same thing.

Like Adam and Eve
We no longer people live in Paradise.

Separation from God has become part of the human fabric.

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We catch glimpses of what life could have been like.

Take for example the late artist Thomas Kincaid.

He stated that his paintings were attempts to create images
Of how the world would have been
If sinned never entered the human condition.

In his paintings, we see images of peace and quietness
A particular light suggesting the presence of Christ.

However, Thomas Kincaid
Who captured these pre-sin images
As he called them

Himself, struggled with the sin of alcohol
And sexual impropriety
Himself, caught between the dream and reality.

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We live with this innate sense that life
Isn't what it was intended to be.

Life is filled of disappointments, failures, hardships
Broken dreams and empty promises.

All this is summed up in one word, sin.

The writer of Ecclesiastes found this to be true as well

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 (NLT)

22 So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? 23 Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.

However, the Apostle Paul says, “hold on a minute!”

Paul writes just as sin and death came into being
Through the disobedience of one, Adam

So too, the fullness of life, and eternity
Comes through the obedience of another, Jesus.

Christ’s obedience supersedes Adam’s disobedience.

2 Corinthians 5:19 (CEV)

19 What we mean is that God was in Christ, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world.

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God, in Christ offers an unconditional forgiveness
To anyone and everyone broken by sin.

God, in Christ heals the brokenness within us
Caused by our sin or another sin’s impact on us.

God, in Christ offers a second chance, and new beginning.

2 Corinthians 5:17 (CEV) What this means is that those who become Christian become new persons. They are not the same anymore for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!

Anne Lamott puts it this way.

Grace means you're in a different universe from where you had been stuck, when you had absolutely no way to get there on your own.

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A newspaper reporter asked

The well-known church leader G.K. Chesterton
What was wrong with the world.

His answer was simple.

He skipped over the assume responses.

He didn't say it was the result of corrupt politicians
Or warring factions
Or the greed of the rich.

He didn't respond by suggesting it was poverty
Unjust laws, or inadequate education.

He didn't say it was the environmental degradation
Population growth, or evils of institution

When asked what was wrong with the world
He simply replied, "I am!"

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We need something to pull us out of the mud we're stuck in.

To get away from the rock and hard place
We find ourselves in

We need something more in life

Than the harsh realities that life brings.

The disappointments, the failures, the mistakes
We need something to rise up above all this.

We need Jesus.

We need Jesus as Savior.

We don't need to understand how it all works
We just need to know that it does.

Jesus is all about second chances
New beginnings
Of abounding peace
Of unconditional love
Of an abiding presence.
Of endless grace.

Anne Lamott has a way to circumvent Christian verbiage
To say the same thing without using
All the old tired Christian terminology

Her thoughts on grace.

It is unearned love--the love that goes before, that greets us on the way. It's the help you receive when you have no bright ideas left, when you are empty and desperate and have discovered that your best thinking and most charming charm have failed you.

Grace is the light or electricity or juice or breeze that takes you from that isolated place and puts you with others who

are as startled and embarrassed and eventually grateful as you are to be there

So how do we get there?

I mean, how do we begin this process
Of turning away from sin
And turning to Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Romans 10:8b-10 MSG

**The word that saves is right here,
as near as the tongue in your mouth,
as close as the heart in your chest.**

It's the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching.

Say the welcoming word to God—"Jesus is my Master"—embracing, body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead.

That's it. You're not "doing" anything; you're simply calling out to God, trusting him to do it for you. That's salvation.

With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: "God has set everything right between him and me!"

Let us pray.