

“Rooted in Christ: “God’s Everlasting Mercy - Christ’s Sacrificial Love”

Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: September 15, 2024



What a difference a week makes, what a difference a chapter makes!

Last week, we heard that long before the foundations of the earth were laid, God’s plan was for humanity to be in harmony with God, with one another, and with themselves. We heard about Jesus as the perfect expression of God’s love for us.

This week we hear that God’s beloved humanity became mired in sin and needed saving.

When I was growing up, we talked more about sin than we do now.

As a little girl, I saw sin as a catalogue of do’s and don’ts.

There was a list for being good and a list for being bad.

But it wasn’t until I got older than I came to understand that sin is much more than a list of do’s and don’ts. Sin is what creates separation. Sin creates a wreckage¹ of relationships.

The most familiar story we have about sin is the story of Adam and Eve.

Whether you regard Eden as an actual place or as a symbolic place, the story of Adam and Eve gives us a picture of the chasm that grew between God’s beautiful plan to be in harmony with humanity and the disharmony that emerged instead.

Eden gives us a visual of what happens when humanity separates itself from God and God’s intentions.

We painfully watch as Adam and Eve chose the path of being God themselves and then “bear the crushing weight of that decision.”

We watch “the isolation and despair that can come from selfish choices.”²

Frederick Buechner describes sin as the act of pushing others away in order to be at the center of the universe. Sin is also the alienation and loneliness we feel when we push God and others away.³

Adam and Eve pushed God away through disobedience, pushed each other away through blaming and left themselves a inner wreck.

Sin was both the wrecking ball and the wreckage itself of broken relationships, inner isolation, and alienation from life as it was intended.

We all love grace.

And yet, it is possible to get to grace too soon . . .

¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin*.

² Both quotations from Gary Moon, “Two Selves, Two Trees”

³ Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words*, “Sin,” 369.

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Barbara Brown Taylor tells a story of being at Yale Divinity School. She remembers becoming irate because the books she wanted were never in the library although the card catalog said they should be. When she asked the librarian what was going on, he told her that the divinity school had the highest rate of stealing among the graduate libraries at the university. When she asked the librarian why that was, he answered with one word . . . “grace . . . You guys figure all has been forgiven ahead of time, so you can go ahead and take what you want.”⁴

They took the grace, but left the sin.

Their approach to grace gave them a free book, but God’s approach to grace is so much bigger.

Grace is what can get us un-mired and opens the door to a new way, to new life.

Last week, I had the privilege of hearing a young man’s recovery story from alcohol and opioids. This was an individual who was deeply mired in addiction. He knew it, but he was caught. One day, a friend knocked on this young man’s door with the intention of confronting him about his addiction. The young man looked through the peep hole first and then remarkably he answered the door.

When the young man reflected back on that day through the eyes of someone who had done the hard work of recovery, he was stunned to realize that the timing of that knock was absolutely perfect. If the friend had come 5 minutes earlier, the young man wouldn’t have answered because he was taking drugs. If the friend had come 5 minutes later,, the young man would have been feeling the effects of the drugs, and he wouldn’t have wanted to answer. There was only a five minute window of availability into which his friend could have knocked, and he would have answered. It also helped that as the young man was trying to decide whether to open the door, he heard a voice inside his head saying . . . “you need to answer the door or you are going to die.”

When he opened the door, his friend simply said: “are you ready?”

Jesus knocks for all of us.

We watch in the Gospels as Jesus spends time with those who have pushed others away or been pushed away by others.

Jesus comes — not with punishment or guilt or shame.

Jesus comes with an offer of new life, of transformation.

We live in a world that is sinful. It is easy to get mired in sin.

It is all too easy to turn in on ourselves and think that we were made to live life for ourselves instead of God and others.

It is all too easy to get mired down with the guilt and shame and fear and trauma that says we are unworthy.

Sometimes we are mired in sin because we have been the victim of sin, violence and trauma.

Sometimes we are mired in sin because of the disastrous, individual choices we have made.

Sometimes we are mired in sin because of the way our world does things that we know are wrong.

⁴ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Speaking of Sin*, 52.

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As the person who coined the phrase, “Generation X”, told the author Philip Yancey: “My secret is that I need God – that I am sick and can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give – I am no longer giving. I need help to be kind – I am no longer capable of being kind. I need help to love – I seem beyond being able to love.”⁵

My own experience is that I need regular saving from my tendency to want to be in charge, to pushing people away consciously or unconsciously, and to not walking in the ways of love. I don’t really like the limelight, but I do like taking center stage in my own life.

It helps me on a regular basis to come back and look at what is in the way of my relationship with God and with others and with myself — and to ask for Jesus’ saving grace . . . not simply for a free book . . . but to be truly transformed more and more into the ways of love and into walking in God’s will.

It is important that we stay rooted in Christ rather than rooted in ourselves, in sin or in our sinful world.



This is an image of how easy it is to be shaped by what is around us and to turn in on ourselves.

Christ wants to come and transform us so we are rooted instead in Christ.

Jesus knocks —and comes with an invitation to grow and to become more rooted in Christ.

Are you ready?

⁵ Philip Yancey, quoting Douglas Coupland, 279.