



Sin: Roadblocks to Abundant Life

Theology Statement

Perhaps more than any other topic in Christian faith, the word *sin* sounds old-fashioned and out of date. It conjures images of zealous preachers warning their listeners about the fires of hell, and equally disturbing images of an angry God whose primary role is to condemn us for our mistakes. For many people, sin is simply the religious version of breaking the law: clergy function as police; God hands down the sentence.

We dismiss these superficial understandings of sin as woefully missing the point. When we read about violence in the daily newspaper, talk to our neighbors about crime, or witness the degradation of our communities and the environment, we see anew that the world is not a perfect place. We fail to treat each other as made in God's image. Far too many of God's creatures are denied the benefits of God's abundant creation. This, surely, is what we mean by sin.

As Anglican Christians, our approach to sin begins with the unqualified goodness of Creation, including ourselves, confirmed for us by God's loving embrace of our humanity in Jesus and in the work of the Holy Spirit throughout the world. In other words, God longs for us to thrive, and sin is whatever separates us from God, and prevents us from living that abundant life which Jesus said he came to proclaim (John 10:10). In this view, sin is not merely a matter of making personal mistakes. Sin has just as much to do with the many cultural factors and social conditions that derail God's loving design for all of us: economic injustice, institutionalized racism, systemic oppression and violence.

Most Eucharistic liturgies celebrated in the Episcopal Church include a corporate confession of sin. This is not only a time for cataloguing one's own faults and shortcomings, it is also a time to acknowledge how the whole human family has fallen short of living the abundant life God intends; how each of us—either willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously—participates in this communal distortion of God's loving intent.

By turning as a community to Scripture and Traditions, and reflecting on these sources together in the light of Reason, we can discern God's loving intent for the world, and how it has yet to be realized. Just as importantly, we can also hear the word of forgiveness. This word of reconciliation and healing offers us the grace and strength we need to begin again and to embrace in thought, word, and deed, the vision of wholeness and abundant life for all people.

Take-Home Materials for Session Six

The work of the Gospel calls us to go out into the world, to take the learning, prayer, and spirit of the community to the people of God who are not gathered in our community. This week, as you reflect on your experience, here are some resources to focus your meditation, prayer, and study. You may have time to do all of these things during your week. You may only have time for some of the suggestions. Whatever you do, please keep the members of your small group in your thoughts as you carry out your work.

Outline of the Faith (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 848)

Sin and Redemption

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.

Q. How does sin have power over us?

A. Sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted.

Q. What is redemption?

A. Redemption is the act of God which sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death.

Q. How did God prepare us for redemption?

A. God sent the prophets to call us back to himself, to show us our need for redemption, and to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Q. What is meant by the Messiah?

A. The Messiah is one sent by God to free us from the power of sin, so that with the help of God we may live in harmony with God, within ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.

Q. Who do we believe is the Messiah?

A. The Messiah, or Christ, is Jesus of Nazareth, the only Son of God.

Prayer for the Week (Book of Common Prayer, pg. 360, Confession, Rite II)

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Scripture for the Week

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, not things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ our Lord. **Romans 8:37-39** New Revised Standard Version

Journaling

Journaling is a good way for adults to pay attention to their faith lives. You are encouraged to journal so that you can consider the questions that develop during our time together. Like with other prayer disciplines, it often helps to pick a time to write in your journal each day, setting it aside in some way. The question to think about as you write this week appears below.

Reflection for the Week

In our society, we have a mania for list-making. We seem to love to talk about sin, who's sinning, and what sin might be. In the video for this session, the Rt. Rev. Stephen Charleston says that we "become mesmerized by sin." What fascinates you about sin? Why do you read the gossip column? (if you do) What is it about dirty laundry, your own or that of others, that captures your attention?