

Hope In The Midst Of Sin

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] May the words of my mouth, may the meditations of each and every one of our hearts be acceptable always in thy sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

As the increasing number of candles burning in the two readings remind us, we are coming closer and closer to our mission at the end of November, our parish mission called Light in Our Darkness. And today, as further steps in our preparation for that mission, there are two new things appearing in our midst.

First of all, when you go to coffee hour this morning, as I hope you all do, you will find a new desk set up there with a big sign over it.

Light in Our Darkness and an arrow pointing down saying, Information. And it's to that desk that you will be able to go now week by week to sign up on the various lists to help with various tasks to prepare for the mission.

[1 : 33] And it's to that desk you can go week by week to keep yourself up to date on the news about the mission. Please know his vocation this morning and do make use of it.

The other new thing is, I hope you all got one as you came in, a yellow card that starts Light in Our Darkness and Advent Mission, which you will find, as the designers of this card wanted me to be sure to say, you'll find it can be folded very nicely in half with the two prayers facing out.

So that you can, for example, put it on your table where you eat your meals every day. And perhaps say one or the other of those prayers as part of St. Grace at dinner.

And within it, you will find the space where you can write the names of people you particularly wish to pray for in connection with the mission.

People that you would like to be aware of the love and the grace of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 42] So you can write those names inside as a reminder. And perhaps it doesn't hurt if number one on each of our cards is our own name.

Because we, as much as anyone else, need to learn and to gain and to grow from this mission. But this mission would not really be necessary if it weren't for the events that unfold in the third chapter of Genesis on page three in your new Bible.

It's not the passage just before and then the passage that was our first reading this morning.

Because in the third chapter of Genesis, we find the roots of the mass that we make of our lives and of our relationships and of our world.

It's at this point, in only the third chapter of the Bible, that evil becomes a present reality in human affairs.

The part of chapter three I'd like you to look at, first of all, is actually the seven verses that preceded this morning's reading. The first seven verses of chapter three.

[4 : 04] And I want you to just quickly look at them in order to notice that the real, the very real ease with which evil takes over in human life.

There it happens so quickly and so easily. You'll notice that it all starts with a snake. A snake with a quick mind and a forked tongue and a fast mouth.

That snake, that serpent as the Revised Standard Version translates it, does three things in that short conversation with the woman.

You'll notice that the snake, first of all, denies the truth. And then the snake goes on to suggest an unworthy motive for the truth.

The truth that one tree is out of bounds when it comes to eating. Finally, the snake moves on to hold out to the woman the hope of a great good that can be heard if only she will disobey God.

[5 : 25] Isn't that the way evil always comes to us? Let's just make this a cash affair, says the obliged plumber.

No checks, no receipts. The government has all the money now anyway, and it's only being greedy if it wants any more.

No, you can save some on the price. I'll save some on my income tax. We'll both be happy.

Evil always sounds so good. And indeed, it seems to make a perverted sort of sin. So the woman adds up, easily persuading.

She finds that the more she looks at it, the more attractive wrongdoing becomes. It becomes attractive rather than repulsive. It's the way it does for us, too.

[6 : 38] It's the way it does for the parent who gets home 6 o'clock at night, having left the house at 7.30 in the morning, and says to himself or herself, what's the matter if I yell at the kids?

They probably deserve it anyway. But it'll do me some good. I'll get some frustrations off my chest, and maybe it'll smarten the kids up.

Evil, once we recognize its existence, looks ever more attractive. And so we just slide down the slippery but imperceptible slope into evil, into sin, without ever blinking, without ever really taking the trouble to notice what we're doing.

That's because evil normally appeals to my arrogance. It appeals to the fact that I don't want any limitations on my life.

I want my life to be unfettered. The snake said to the woman, to eat the fruit from that tree, you'll be as wise as God.

[8 : 11] Wise as God. That's the way evil is. Sounds so good.

Makes me sound like I'll be in control of this. So quickly, very, very quickly, evil, the, if you like, abstract idea, becomes sin.

Concrete hat. And it's with sin becoming concrete that we come to the reading that we heard first this morning, beginning with verse 8.

And in that reading, in the light of what has just happened before, we come face to face with the very real truth that the poison of sin in human affairs is all-encompassing.

It takes in everything. And the first thing that the poison of sin does is that it's found in the way we make our excuses.

[9 : 22] I don't know about you, but beginning with verse 8, the portrayal of the man there sounds amazingly like me, in fact, embarrassingly like me.

He hears the fellow who has given in to evil even more easily than the woman gave in to him. And when God comes to him and calls him to admit his guilt, all he'll say at first, all he'll admit at first is that he's naked.

When he's pushed by God, pushed to admit the full truth, what does he do? He points the finger elsewhere.

He says to God, well, the woman did it. And besides, it's all your fault, God, because I didn't want her. You just gave her to me. She was all your idea. But really, I guess it's your fault.

By pointing the finger elsewhere, he hopes to get off the hook. It's amazing how many people down through the years have revolted against Anglican liturgical form mainly because of two words that you've already said this morning.

[10 : 55] Those words were found in the prayer of confession when each of us said that we are miserable sinners. Most people, that's offensive.

Indeed, that's unacceptable. The attitude is that I'm not an offender and I'm not miserable and I'm not going to say that in public.

But the fact is that we are sinners.

The fact is that we, like the man and the woman in this early stages of the human race, have done wrong.

And that in our doing wrong, there's really no alibi that we can use that will get us off the hook.

Excuses just won't save us.

[12 : 05] Only a humble and a contrite heart which appeals to the mercy of Jesus Christ can really redeem us from the clutches of evil.

only dropping our excuses and admitting our guilt will make a difference. Second, I hope you notice from this passage that the infection of sin leads to distorted relationships.

It's only after the sin of eating the forbidden fruit that the man and the woman notice that they're naked.

And in noticing they're naked, try to hide themselves from the eyes of each other and from the eyes of God. Now, it's quite possible for them, quite possible for us to cover our naked body.

Today, it's like us. They can't hide the reality of their guilt. The eyes of God.

[13:29] The heart of God. So, by doing what God, the one thing that God has asked them not to do, alienation has entered human life.

Lonely has entered human life. one particular way as God already promised, the male-female relationship.

is that the male-female relationship will no longer be what God intended it to be, a mutual partnership, but rather it will become a relationship of dominance and pain.

male-female relationship will become far too often a master-slave relationship.

That's so easy too, isn't it? What I say goes, say a whole lot of husbands, because I'm the boss.

[14:58] out of those words, out of that mindset, comes a relationship in which dominance, pain, fear often plays upon us.

that a master-slave relationship often maintained by the man either by inflicting physical blows upon the woman from time to time or by threatening to withdraw financial support.

That isn't something that happens out there somewhere. That happens in the respectable and in the seemingly happy marriages even within the family of the Christian church.

Nowhere will you escape that. You see, alienation from God by the act of sin leads us to alienation even from those who are closest to us because sin distorts all of our human relationships.

Then there's the third infection, if you like. That's the infection of sin making work, not joy, but drudgery. You notice that part of the, if you like, sentence handed down by God is that the close link between man and the environment is broken.

[16:54] There is now enmity between the human race and the rest of God's creatures. From now on, the ground is a curse to human beings.

sin. And when you add this broken relationship between humanity and the environment to the distortion of human relationships arising from that first sin, then what you have is trouble in the workplace.

So we end up fighting the soil for our food. we end up fighting the bedrock and forest for our basic materials.

We end up fighting rivers and lakes to get unpolluted drinking water. We end up fighting machines to get a chance to do something meaningful on the job.

We end up fighting our bosses and our employees for a bigger share of the money. frustration enters the workplace.

[18:12] Disappointment enters the workplace. And the end result of this frustration, this disappointment with work can lead us in either one of two ways.

Either we can seek every way possible to avoid work or we can go in the exact opposite direction and we can surrender to the very narrow confined world of the workaholic.

Rebellion against God and against its purposes takes the joy and takes the fulfillment of how the human works. Fourth, the infection of sin brings death.

You may have noticed in verse 19, God says, you are dust. Dust shall return.

When evil enters human life, it's found to be dangerous and deadly. In fact, far more deadly than it would appear at first glance.

[19:36] death, because of sin, physical death takes on a frightening aspect. And so we fight death.

We fight death because we see death as the end of everything and as the beginning of a nothingness that shattered hope. We fight death.

We fight it in every way possible. We try to deny that it's going to happen to me until I die, until that last split second when I can't avoid it any longer.

We fight death by trying to get our bodies frozen by the latest in high-tech refrigeration with the idea that someday we can be brought back from death.

We can cheat death. Death can be eliminated. Without God, death is physical.

[20:42] But without God, death is also far more than physical. Death becomes our total annihilation. Death obliterates hope.

Death sponges it into gloom and despairing. Before we all go off and hide ourselves in dark despair in our liquor cabinets, we need to recognize something else.

And that is that in the midst of sin, which is where we are every day, in the midst of sin, there is hope. And that hope is the grace of God.

You see, the grace of God, the loving kindness of God is such that God wishes to rescue us from the mess we make of our lives, from the mess we human beings make of our world.

God So the story of the Bible that follows on from this particular passage is a story, excuse me, is a story in which God acts.

[22 : 05] It's a story in which the wishes of God become the purpose of God. And the purpose of God becomes Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ crucified, killed, to pay the deadly penalty that our sin brings upon us.

And also, Jesus Christ risen from death, risen from death to give us full, new, eternal life, the life which defies death.

death. So the Bible that here by the third chapter is becoming a story of sin and despair, ends, if you look at the last chapter of the book of Revelation, the Bible ends with victory and with hope.

Victory in that Christ has died and risen again to break the bonds of death upon our lives. hope that the Christ who has broken the bonds of sin and death is going to return again sooner than we might expect.

The baptism service that we have all been part of this morning is a symbol, a sign of that hope.

[23 : 38] baptism, in the water that in our tradition more often than not is sprinkled symbolically over it, in that act of baptism, we are symbolically filled, drowned, filled to sin.

as we move away from the farm, as we in essence rise symbolically out of the waters that have drowned us, we are symbolically raised to life, to a new life, as the redeemed daughters and sons of God.

baptism, so the reason for our mission next month, the reason for the weekly preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ is to call those who have been baptized to realize their baptism.

The call of the mission is to us to make real what has happened to us symbolically in baptism, to make that a reality in our lives, and to make it real by accepting the redeeming love of God in Christ, accepting it by opening our hearts, by opening our minds, by opening our lives to the love of God.

So, beginning the 24th of November, we are all going to hear the call of God, call to move our lives from the ritual of baptism to the reality of a life of obedience to Christ.

[25 : 44] May we hear that call clearly. May we act upon it precisely. turn our ...

... .. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.