

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
January 8, 2017
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV
Matthew 3:13-17

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.

(Matthew 3:13 N.R.S.V.)

Sin, Don't Do It!

In our lesson from Matthew, Jesus comes to be baptized by John. Why did he do that? After all, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and Jesus was sinless. Many reasons have been suggested. The one most compelling to me is that Jesus identified with John's message of repentance.

There is a modern misconception that John was hard on sin and Jesus was soft on sin. As I said that is a misconception. Jesus also preached, "repent for the kingdom of God is at hand."

In allowing himself to be baptized, Jesus was holding up the importance of repentance. The word repent means simply to turn around or to change direction. As Christians we are to turn from sin and to turn to God.

We don't talk much about sin these days. There was a time when preachers talked about sin all the time, so much so, that it seemed the message of the love of God was lost. These days we may have gone to the opposite extreme. We have talked so much about the power of God's love that we have ignored the destructive power of sin. And make no bones about it, sin is destructive.

So here's the thing, we have many people in our society who consider themselves Christians, but do not consider themselves to be sinners. They consider themselves to be basically good people. Maybe part of the problem lies in the way we define sin.

Ask most people and they will tell you sin is a particular act, stealing, lying, murdering, adultery, taking the Lord's name in vain. These are the so-called sins of commission. That is, doing something bad. There are also the sins of omission. And that is the one that catches most of us. The sins of omission are the failure to do the good things, caring for a sick neighbor, helping out someone who is in trouble, remembering to pray for others. Who can ever be completely loving all of the time?

Another way of defining sin is to talk about it not so much in terms of actions, but in terms of attitude. Sin is rebellion against God. Sin is claiming that we do not need God and that we can

decide for ourselves what is good and what is bad.

So why is it important to be aware of sin and work to avoid it? Good question, I'm glad you asked. First of all, sin is destructive. God created us to live in a loving relationship with him and other people. When we set ourselves up as God, whether that is greed, or lust, or whatever, we create pain for ourselves and the others in our lives. Instead of harmony in our lives we experience chaos and unrest.

Also it is important to be aware of sin, because without that awareness, we do not appreciate the offer of salvation provided by Jesus Christ. As long as we think we can save ourselves, we do not ask for help.

If a person falls into a deep pit, the first thing they are going to do is try to climb back out themselves. It is only when the person realizes that they can't get out, will they ask for help. And here is an interesting thing that I have observed. The closer a person draws to God, the more aware that person is of their failure to love fully, of their sin. Whereas, people who will tell you that they believe in God, but who rarely give any thought to God, seem to have little awareness of their sin and brokenness.

So the chances are that most of you listening today are already aware of how far you fall short of what God intends for us. So let me drill down on this a bit. Even after we are aware of our sin, it is easy to become lazy about correcting our bad habits and unloving ways. After all, God does forgive us and keep on loving us.

I recently ran across a quote that compared our struggle against sin to repairing a house. If you have ever owned a house, you know that there is always something that needs to be done. The roof is leaking and needs to be repaired. The porch needs to be scraped and repainted. The storm door is loose on its hinges and doesn't shut properly.

So what do we do? Do we say, "There is no use to fix that leaky faucet in the bathroom, because something else will just break?" Well, I suppose there are some people who do say that, and before very long they are living in a dump. Most of us know that we are never going to get everything fixed, but we keep working at it all the time.

The same thing is true of our spiritual lives. We may acknowledge with the Apostle Paul that no matter how hard we try, we still sin. However, that doesn't mean we just ignore those areas of our lives. Instead as God makes us aware of sin in our life, we ask his help and work to repair the damage that sin is doing in our lives. We do this little by little, day by day. Yes it is hard work, but who wants to live in a spiritual dump?

Amen.