

Today is the first Sunday in Lent, an introspective season when Christians work to do better. In keeping with the spirit of Lent, we're beginning a sermon series on the topic of sin and repentance. Each week we will take this up by focusing on a different manifestation of sin—white supremacy one week, misogyny another, environmental destruction yet a third week. I can see you all reaching for your calendars now, getting ready to make a note: sermon series on sin and repentance, next six weeks...skip church...

Sin and repentance...sin and repentance. I used to think sin was something totally different than I do now. I used to think that sin was a bunch of dos and don'ts, a list of transgressions from Leviticus or Deuteronomy fished out of the murky deeps of the past plopped in the middle of modern life to thrash around. I used to think sin was that set of things that other people told me I was doing wrong and that repentance was just a decision to cut it out.

And I didn't believe in sin and repentance. I thought nothing of sin because no two people in a row would tell me exactly the same list of things I was doing wrong. And I had no use for repentance because it sounded like

sniffing through every part of my life and upon finding any joy or pleasure, depriving myself of it. I thought, no more of this sin and repentance talk! Let God's grace abound.

I wasn't right about what sin is. My idea of sin was like a paper cutout of a monster, and I would hold it up and say: I'm not afraid of that, that's not even real. But the problem is, sin really does exist, and not believing in it is no protection. If anything, it made me more vulnerable.

Sin is not what someone else tells me I'm doing wrong. Sin is more like a voice. It's a voice that lives inside of me. Sin is a voice in my head that sounds so much like my own voice that I could swear it was me talking. Sin is that voice that says to me: "I can't believe you just said that, what an idiot". Sin is the voice that says "this is exactly what you always do". Sin is the voice saying "you're never going to be anything but a...you've always been such a...if any of these people knew what you're really like". Sin is the voice that talks to me about who I am, what I am worth, what I can become. Sin says things to me that I would never say to another person. I would never say those things about another person, even someone I hated, even

someone awful, I would never say those things. In moments when I'm alone, and weak, and vulnerable, the voice of sin can be so loud, and it sounds so much like my own, I could swear it was me talking.

And the voice, if I listen to it long enough, if I believe it deeply enough...well.

After sin has finished convincing me how little I am worth, Sin will turn to the rest of its agenda, telling me how little everything is worth too, whispering advice about what I might as well go ahead and do because what does it matter. And when the world is a worthless place, outrages seem reasonable.

Every person who ever drank themselves to death, every person who ever embezzled money and spun a web of lies so vast it swallowed their whole world, every person who ever let violent fantasies become a day of horror, inside every single one, the voice of sin was giving guidance on the path.

Every one had long ago given the voice of sin pride of place among counselors.

That is what Sin is, not some dried out list of dos and don'ts. Sin is the voice living inside of me, telling me who I am and what I deserve, telling me who

those people are--what those kinds of people deserve, sin is that voice whispering directions, telling me the next twist or turn on the road but never revealing the final destination—though I suspect I know.

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. It is no longer I that do it, but sin that lives inside me.

Romans Chapter 7.

That what is what Sin is. And I believe in that. In fact, I can't make any sense of the state of the world without it.

Sin and repentance...sin and repentance...I was wrong about what sin is, I underestimated it. But I was wrong about what repentance is too, I underestimated that, too. Repentance is a simple word, in Greek. It just means turn around, like you would on a highway when you realize you missed your exit, it means turn around the way you would when you hear a familiar voice calling your name from far away, turn around.

If sin is that voice inside of you shouting—you'll never be anything but a, everyone one's knows you're nothing but a, when sin is shouting in your

face—turn around. Turn around, there is another voice calling from far away.

Turn around and stop believing the things that sin says about you, start believing the things that God says about you. Sin says—you're never going to amount to anything—God says, I have made you a little lower than the angels and crowned you with glory. Sin says—if anybody knew who you really are, they would never love you. God says, before a word is even on your lips I have known it completely, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. Repentance is turning around, and not turning any old direction, turning to God, believing in what God has said about you. Because Sin is a liar and what God says is true. God spoke and the worlds came into being. God speaks to you, let your new life come into being.

I don't underestimate sin any more. Homophobia shouts down your worth before God. Addiction tries to gutter out the light of your possibilities. An abusive partner has convinced you to count up your worth like pocket change.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? Go who did not withhold the anointed Son, but gave Christ for all, will God not also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, it is Christ who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

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, nor 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 Jesus our Lord.