

Dear fellow redeemed,

Our Lenten journey begins with the Psalms, **Psalm 51** in particular. In this Psalm, David is confessing his sin and his need for forgiveness. He says:

“according to thy abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment.”

David is saying he deserves punishment for his sin. He knows he is a sinner in the eyes of God. The question can be asked, can you? Can you acknowledge that in the eyes of God you are a sinner. It is because of you and me that Christ died on the cross. Yes, not only for me and you did he die, but because of us. Because of our sins, Jesus died.

The Psalmist says, “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” We are born into sin and live our whole lives as sinners. Now you might be saying, not me pastor. I am a good person. I live a life that does not do all those awful sins like kill, steal, commit adultery. How can I be a sinner. Yet, in God’s eyes

we are sinners. We fall short of what God expects of us all the time. Our, as we call them, “little sins” mount up according to what God expects of us. We are like the birds in the following:

Erin and I went to Niagara Falls and stood at the edge watching some the water. I moved over to where a man was watching some birds. The birds were swooping down to snatch a drink or food from the clean water. A man standing next to me told me how in winter he had seen birds plunge into the water. They had dipped down for a drink, and ice had formed on their wings. Then they had dipped for another, and another, and more and more ice formed on their little bodies. Another dip or two and they could not rise. Into the Falls they went.

Sin is as deceptive as the sparkling water of Niagara wintry rapids. Dip into it once too often, and we are not able to lay aside the weight which sin gives us by clinging so closely." Since God demands perfection and we cannot achieve it, our sins do mount up. We are sinners. Our sins do have not to be what we consider the awful sins, killing, stealing and committing adultery. They can be the everyday sins of our own pride, our own built in prejudice, our own ideas of what should be right and wrong.

Our sins come from within and they do mount up in the eyes of God. But do we stand forever as sinners? Do you and I deserve only God's punishment and wrath? No!!, listen to what David says next:

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.

He asks God to cleanse his heart. Put a new and right spirit within me God. We first must understand and acknowledge our position before God. We are sinners, period. Then we can turn to God and ask for his cleansing forgiveness. God can change us from the inside out with his grace and mercy. All we must do is acknowledge our need for it.

It is like hunger. Our stomach growls, it hurts and once we finally acknowledge what the pain is, we take care of it. We feed our hunger. Just like the pain in the pit of your heart, the pain of sin, once we acknowledge it, once we fall on our knees before the throne of God and acknowledge our sinfulness, God will take care of it.

Yes, it is that easy for us because Jesus paid the price of our sinfulness. He paid the cost for all the awful things, and the little things we have done in our lives.

On this Ash Wednesday, we need to acknowledge our sinfulness, we need to come to the table of the Lord with hearts willing to acknowledge our position before God. We come to the table as sinners and we receive forgiveness in through and around the body and blood of Christ.

As the ashes are placed on your forehead, reminding you of your sin and the forgiveness of God through the cross of Christ, acknowledge your sin and repent. Ask for forgiveness. The ashes are traditionally from the palms used on the previous Palm Sunday and a reminder of the Holy Week work of Christ. The week he gave us his body and blood as the payment for our sins so that today and everyday we might ask for forgiveness and cleansing.

Our Lenten journey begins as we push our boats from the shore and see the forgiveness God has planned for us through the life of his son Jesus Christ.

A closing story sums this all up for us: Imagine yourself looking out over a landscape of thousands and thousands of people. People who seem happy, playing, dancing, laughing and celebrating. As you focus in on their faces, they look just like you, you even see friends, neighbors, relatives and one who looks exactly like you. As you continue to watch these people, you notice that some don't move as

free as others, you see they are linked by invisible chains, to huge weights. Weights of resentment, or bitterness, or non-forgiveness, or self-control, or loneliness, or deep guilt, or a broken spirit or unfaithfulness, or non-trust, or petty complaints, or worry, or gossip or wanting to be number one, or pride, or weights of knowing what is best for everyone, or self-righteousness, or religious bigotry, or weights of piety.

You see all these weights, some huge, some medium size, some small but everyone you see is chained to some kind of weight. Some carry their weights with ease, disguising the fact they have to carry a weight, others are struggling, it affects their lives the way they move, dance, interact with others. You look around and you see the one who looks like you, you see the weights or weights attached.

Everyone is smiling, even the one who looks like you, but you can see their burdens, you can see their struggles, you can see how their lives their every move is affected by the weights they carry. You long to free them, you long to find some way to release them from those weights, but at last you know you cannot, as they know they cannot free themselves.

Then you see one moving among the people one who has no weight, only a key which says “freedom and release” and he is

moving about unlocking, releasing the people from their weights and chains. Releasing people and giving them the chance to move freely--releasing them to move uninhibited. But sadly some don't let him, they move away from him, they continue to dance their own dance weighted down by their weight and chain.....

You see others, who are given the strength and courage to carry their weights, because even this one can not free them in this land, but he gives them a promise they will be free in another land he promises to bring them to when their walk through this land is finished. You even see this man reach out to help carry as many of those weights as he can. Some are freed, some are given strength and courage some are given help in carrying their weight, and some move away from him in self pride, still disguising their weights, still pretending they have no weights whatsoever to carry.

Then you focus on the one who looks like you, this person, this man, this Christ moves toward you and you...what will you let Him do with your weights?

Amen