

Well it isn’t the most uplifting way to begin a sermon, but I want to share a brief overview of ideas about Sin. Sin can mean an individual’s failure to live up to a certain set of rules, laws, or moral codes. Sin can have collective implications as in the doctrine of original sin. It was interesting to find out the ancient Greeks thought of sin as the failure of a person to achieve the true, full expression of themselves to preserve his or her relation to the rest of the universe. In the First Testament Christians understand Sin as a deliberate defiance of God’s commandments due to human pride and self-centeredness. In more modern times the church has often defined Sin as separation; actions and ideas which separate us from God, each other, and ourselves.

With this background we turn to Isaiah who describes the difference between true and false worship. That’s what ‘fast’ means here, it is another word for worship. The prophet is describing how his people go to temple worship, but they leave and return to a life of, “serving your own interests, oppressing all your workers, quarreling and fighting.” Isaiah closes the first part of the reading asking, “Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the lord?”

No! It sounds most unacceptable to the Lord. Isaiah’s neighbors are entering the temple; we presume they experience God infused, Spirit-refreshing worship. Worship teaching they are a child of God, a gift of love, a light of hope in the world. Worship assuring them of God’s undying and unconditional love. We trust they are uplifted by stories of God overcoming the worst troubles. Strengthened by the Spirit unleashed in the world to heal. Encouraged by forgiveness which releases them from the bondage of guilt and sin. Isaiah wants his neighbors to take their worship out into the world. But that is not what is happening...

Instead, they return to daily life forgetting who God made them to be. In light of Isaiah’s observation, I invite us to think of sin in just one more way this morning. As the intentional creation of turmoil. Chaos which dehumanizes, apathy which allows oppression, and unchecked hatred. I am not suggesting chaos is always a sin, but the creation of malicious chaos and its acceptance... I think there is grounding to list this among the biblical definitions of Sin.

We learn early in our faith journey; an essential character of God is Creator. From the beginning, God is fashioning a formless void into day and night -- water, land, and sky, -- sun, moon, and stars -- plants and animals -- and humankind. The theme continues through Egyptian Slavery, the Exodus, hungry and thirsty in the wilderness, climbing the mountain where Moses receives the law, and arriving in the promised land... Every step God is working to create order in turmoil.

It continues in the New Testament, Jesus is born into a most challenging world, oppression and injustice sewn deeply into the fabric of society. No matter the ridicule, suffering and

threats he faced, Jesus brings the full power of God's salvation creating order in the messiness. God's order... offering in one human a beautiful picture of God's kingdom.

Monday I experienced turmoil first hand. I was walking into a local hospital. Outside the entrance to the Emergency room an African American man was surrounded by three officers. At first they were talking calmly. As I walked past a man sitting nearby, also African American, spoke in a raised voice, "just walk away man, don't go to jail over this, it's not worth it, just walk away." As I began to turn I heard the shuffling of feet and an officer say, "we were just asking you to leave, but now you have made a big mistake." As I turned around three officers wrestled the man to the ground, while a fourth was standing over him with gun drawn. The man sitting near me said, "well, he shouldn't have swung at the officers." I didn't see that, but I agreed, "No Never." By this time there were two more officers monitoring the perimeter of the scene. As I stood there I realized the voice I thought was in my head was speaking out loud, I was praying, "Please don't shoot him, please don't have to shoot him, please." A few moments later the scene was controlled and the man near me and I walked into the hospital.

I was stunned, and what I realized is... none of it made sense. It didn't make sense why the man did not leave when Police asked him to. It didn't make sense why it took 6 officers to secure the scene. It didn't make sense why the man being asked to leave didn't at least listen to the gentleman near me telling him to "walk away." It didn't make sense- none of it made sense. It was chaos, chaos we have seen many times on our nightly news.

Having heard my story, please just hang here with me for a few minutes... hang in that moment when nothing about the scene made sense. Before we race to conclusions, or make assumptions or explain this scene away... just sit with me in that scary, tense moment when absolutely nothing made sense.

I want us to linger here because... I feel as though we are living in just such a generation. And I want us to feel the chaos as we listen for Isaiah's message to us... Isaiah calls God's people to take their worship into the streets.

Don't assume the problems are too big, the corruption too entrenched, the hatred too pervasive. The issue in Isaiah's day was his neighbors made God small and once they left the temple they forgot who God made them to be. So, Isaiah appears on the scene, in typical mince-no-words Isaiah style, to reawaken God's people to the awe-inspiring, astonishing, mind blowing power of God. He comes to say faith calls us to live each day fully trusting a God who creates a way out of no way and makes order out of inconceivable turmoil. And this means something for us... We truly are God's dynamically empowered, undyingly courageous, hope-drenched companions and God needs us to take our worship into the community all week long.

I want to close with a quote from Marianne Williamson, spiritual author and teacher, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child

of God. Your playing small does not serve the world.... We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone..."

Remember the children's song, the one most of us adults like too... "This little light of mine." This week I came across a verse I had sung as a child but forgotten as an adult. It left a blank in the lyrics so you could add the name of the places you wanted to let your light shine. I propose something like this...

This little light of mine, shine all over Hales Corners, this little light of mine, Shine all over Wisconsin, This little light of mine, Shine all over God's great world, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."

Amen