

Has anyone been on one of those amusement rides where you're strapped in the inner periphery of whatever contraption you're on? Straps are secured and a centrifugal force is set in motion. Gravity pins bodies to the wall. The faster it goes the stronger the pull. Soon you couldn't free yourself if you tried. Anyone been on those?

They seem crazy to me as I get motion sickness. That's why I find so convincing Frederick Buechner's description of sin as a centrifugal force. Sin, like those rides, nauseates. Sin makes us feel bad. Sin is missing the mark, falling short, pinned away from the center.

Buechner likens sin to a centrifugal force because sin is this being pushed away from the center and from each other – seemingly separating us from the Source of life itself – knocking the breath out of us.

Buechner says: “When sin is at work in a human life, it tends to push everything out toward the periphery. Bits and pieces go flying off until only the core is left. Eventually bits and pieces of the core itself go flying off until nothing is left.”

Sin as alienation is universal. We're tainted by it whether we want to be or not. We see it in the aggressions over Ukraine, in the disregard of life in Iran, in the slighting of minorities in the Holy Lands. We see it in the tenacity of racism and the horrors of gun violence. We see it in the carelessness leading to species extinction and habitat loss.

And we don't have to look further than our own lives. When's the last time you felt pinned at a periphery – separated and saddened by sin larger than you?

When John the Baptist first sees Jesus, he says to those near him, “*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*” John knew he couldn't end sin. He could point people to sin – call them to repent of it. But John couldn't do anything with sin itself. John couldn't keep people from wallowing in it or from being swallowed by it.

Then John had a life-changing experience. The beginning of John's gospel tells us John is called by the Spirit to baptize Jesus. That is incredible! John, called to baptize Jesus.

We're going to talk about this next Sunday at our Annual Vision and Reports Meeting. I hope you'll be here. I want us to consider this – John is called by the Spirit to serve Jesus. But my interest isn't so much John as us – as LCM – as you and me. What call do we hear from the Spirit?

The work we'll do together next Sunday is holy work and it won't be complete without you. So please soak it with me in prayer this week.

Today, we're given the story of John's discovery that Jesus comes precisely to free us from this system called sin. John *saw* the Spirit descend like a dove on Jesus and *heard* a voice from heaven say, "*This is my Son, the Beloved.*"

John *saw* Jesus free people to stand up after they'd fallen.

John *saw* Jesus raise people whose life had paralyzed.

John *saw* Jesus help people walk who thought they'd never walk again.

John *witnessed* Jesus being light at the end of tunnels of hopelessness.

John *saw* Jesus love those considered unlovable.

In response to what John *heard and saw*, he repeated himself, "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"

The original Greek doesn't say "sins" but "sin." This isn't individual sins. It's not about our personal miss-steps or failures. The singular "sin" means the sin-system itself – that centrifugal force that pulls and pins and won't let us go.

John recognizes in Jesus, God's very self, freeing us from the insidious power of sin itself – not by strong arming sin, but by coming as a lamb.

The lamb image hearkens back to the early Israelites being told to slaughter a lamb and mark their door posts with its blood. The angel of death would pass over them if the lamb's blood was on the door. This is where the Jewish Passover comes from.

Christians see Jesus in this image of the lamb. Jesus comes, that sin might pass over us too – rather than kill us off – psychologically and emotionally, if not physically. John says of Jesus, "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"

*Takes away* also translates “lifts up.” Jesus comes to lift sin up and out – breaking its cycle. To take away sin is to turn off its ability to spin us away from the center where God is, away from each other, where joy is.

This is the definition of mercy! God entering our human domain as the Lamb – as love that breaks this crippling cycle, that subverts the system itself. God comes like a child, disarmed, and sin doesn’t know what to do.

Sin masquerades as a powerful bully. It may even seem to dismantle God’s dream of peace on earth, good will to all. But the truth is, sin is powerless in the face of disarming love. Sin is short-lived in comparison to the never-ending kindness and creativity of God.

Lamb-power is just more creative and lasting than sin. Sin runs off to the next temptation while the lamb falls in love. And love never ends. Love outlasts all the forces of alienation.

Sin rears an ugly head, to be sure, but its end is on the horizon. That’s why we pray, *Come, Lord Jesus*. That’s why we encourage one another to not give up when we feel stuck in the grip of sin. God’s love is more creative and lasting than sin.

When you feel spun out and pinned, remember Jesus the Lamb, loves you more. Sin masquerades as power, but God’s love for you, always wins.

Amen

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