

Lake Shore Baptist Church Sermon – June 21, 2020

Charlie Fuller

Text: Genesis 21:8-21 & Romans 6:1b-11

Title: *The Sin That Persists*

I love hearing Sakina read Scripture. Let me encourage you to go to the Lake Shore website and listen to the sermon that she and Kyndall did together last March 17, 2019. It's a powerful word from God.

Prayer

The little boy accidentally spilled an entire carton of milk as he was fixing his breakfast. He was literally beside himself and was devastated. There were some tears shed. The mother carefully mopped the floor and reassured him that everything was going to be all right. As she finished, she said, "Look! See how clean the floor is now!" He turned to her and said, "Maybe I should spill more often."

The mom says, "No." It's absurd, isn't it?

Paul is saying exactly the same thing in today's text from Romans chapter six. Paul is continuing a line of thought begun in chapter five. Chapter five is a detailed theological exposition about grace. Grace is unmerited, bought by the free gift of Jesus. He finishes by saying that as sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

As Paul begins chapter six, he answers the unasked, but obvious question. If grace is unlimited and unmerited, and if grace expands to cover all of our sin – even as our sin increases, shouldn't we just sin more and more? After all, forgiveness already exists to cover our sin no matter how big we sin or how often we sin.

Didn't Jesus already write a blank check for us? If you think about it, it's not an unreasonable question. At least on its face.

Paul says, no. That makes a mockery of the gospel. If we have died to sin and claimed Jesus, how can we continue embracing sin?

I grew up with a pretty easy and efficient way of looking at faith. I suspect many of you had similar experiences. All you had to do was walk down the aisle at church and say the right words to a preacher. Later you would let him (and it was always a "him") hold you underwater for a moment, and then you get to spend eternity with Jesus in heaven after you die.

It was simple, easy, and attractive. Especially since they painted the alternative as an eternity of fire and torment. Come down the aisle, say a few things, get dunked and all's great. You might be bugged a little to actually show up at church occasionally and to give some of your money, but that was really all there was to it.

It was individual and it required very little of anyone. It's was heart-felt, but based on an incomplete reading of Scripture.

But coming to faith is not *simply* an individual experience. In Scripture we see both individuals and entire communities coming to faith. There's a theological tension there. We feel that tension strongly since we live in an incredibly individualistic society, especially here in Texas. As the saying goes, we raised ourselves up by our own bootstraps. (Did you ever think about the physical impossibility of that?) The rugged individualism that's grown out of both American and Texan mythology makes it easy to see life *and* faith through an individualistic lens.

If you view faith through an individualistic lens, then it's easy to view the acting out of that faith through an individualistic lens. It's easy to say, "I'm not a racist. Therefore, I don't have any responsibility for the racism that might exist in society. Racism isn't structural. It's just individuals acting as individual racists."

When we look at life and faith through an individualistic lens, then we become blind to how systems of injustice hurt people, how they actually kill people.

When we look at life through an individualistic lens, we ignore the words of the Old Testament prophets, calling out structural sin.

Hear these words from the prophet Amos:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

I think the prophet Jeremiah could have been living in Washington, DC. He was constantly calling out the institutions of his day and confronting the power structures in place. Over and over he says, "They have treated the *wound of my people carelessly*, saying, "**Peace, peace,**" when there is **no peace**."

The people have a wound. It's been unhealed in North America since the first slave was brought here in 1619. **401** years ago. That's a long time to treat a wound carelessly, but we have. We've done it through slavery. We've done it through Jim Crow segregation and redlining in the housing market. We've done it through segregated schools. We do it through laws and sentencing that disproportionately incarcerate and execute black Americans. We do it through policing based on "warrior"

cultures instead of peace-keeping. We do it through unwritten and unspoken practices. We do it through our very attitudes.

And while we're at it, let's not ignore the institutional and unspoken ways that we, as a society, discriminate against our LGBTQ siblings. There was an important Supreme Court victory this week, but it has a limited scope. There is still so very much work to do.

If we hide from the corporate or institutional sin in which we participate, whether we recognize it or not, we are testing Paul's question. Our lack of action is to continue in sin. It is sin of **omission**, which has the same effect as sin of **commission**. Do we really want to live lives that expect grace to continually cover our corporate participation in racism, in systemic, institutional, corporate, structural racism? *Attitudinal* racism?

On this Juneteenth weekend, let's repent of our corporate, systemic sin. Let's each of us look for ways in which we can participate in the redemption of the systems of oppression that are all around us, marginalizing black people, other people of color, as well as LGBTQ people. May "justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" and may **we** be the ones taking up our own sledgehammers and opening up the walls of oppression.

This is a story from the wonderful preacher and teacher of preaching, Fred Craddock. It's a bit dated, but truth in it is intact. Here are Fred's words:

"I used to go home to west Tennessee, where an old high school chum of mine had a restaurant. I called him Buck. Go home for Christmas, "Merry Christmas, Buck," and I'd get a piece of chess pie and a cup of coffee free. "Merry Christmas, Buck," I'd say. Every year it was the same.

I went in, "Merry Christmas, Buck."

He said, "Let's go for coffee."

I said, "What's the matter? Isn't this the restaurant?"

He said, "I don't know. Sometimes I wonder."

We went for coffee. We sat there and pretty soon he said, "Did you see the curtain?"

I said, "Buck, I saw the curtain. I always see the curtain."

What he meant by curtain is this: They have a number of buildings in that little town; they're called shotgun buildings. They're long buildings and have two entrances, front and back. One's off the street, and one's off the alley, with a curtain and the kitchen in the middle. His restaurant is in one of those. If you're white, you come off the street; if you're black, you come off the alley.

He said, "Did you see the curtain?"

I said, "I saw the curtain."

He said, "The curtain has to come down."

I said, "Good. Bring it down."

He said, "That's easy for you to say. Come in here from out of state and tell me how to run my business."

I said, "Okay, leave it up."

He said, "I can't leave it up."

I said, "Well, take it down."

"I can't take it down." Buck's in terrible shape. After a while he said, "If I take that curtain down, I lose a lot of my customers. If I leave that curtain up, I lose my soul."

We all have our own curtains. What curtains do you need to take down. *Tear* down, now? And what do you need to do to learn in order to see the curtains you've never noticed before?

May God give us all grace to see and to act.

Amen.