

FRIENDLY VISITOR

Pastor's Page

I continue the sermon series on the Psalms, and this month I am printing the sermon on Psalm 32, preached on Pentecost Sunday 2011.

In 1972, on a sunny day in the Chicago loop, a stern-faced man stood on the street corner, and as one person would pass along the street, he, in a pantomime gesture, would lift his right arm and, pointing straight to that person, calling out "Guilty." He elicited some eerie looks from pedestrians, even one remark from an accused man who said, "But how did *he* know?"

Karl Menninger, the famous psychiatrist of the last century, tells this story in his book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*¹ In that book Menninger points out how the word "sin" has disappeared from the public vocabulary, and many private vocabularies. He remarks that if we use the term at all, it is often with some kind of sneering tone, "That's a sin!" when we are referring only to some minor departure from etiquette.

How many times lately have you heard this word used in public discourse, or by a politician, or even some of the popular television evangelists? I suspect you don't need any fingers to count them. Sometimes I look at the Church, especially the mainline Church, and wonder why we are so listless, so lifeless, why our witness is so feeble. And when I read Peter's powerful sermon that he preached on the Day of Pentecost to those who witnessed this miracle, I think I know. This is the admonition that Peter gave them:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:38-39).

Peter says first comes repentance, and then forgiveness of sins, and then the gift of the Holy Spirit. I am convinced that the great need of the Church today is not so much better marketing of our products, or a new style of music, or a greater openness to modern technology, but a desperate need of *repentance*. How can our witness be authentic if we are unaware that we have sinned against God and His grace? How can we receive the Holy Spirit and His power to change the world for Christ when we won't acknowledge that

¹ Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973), pp. 1-2.

somewhere in our spiritual psyche are hidden sins that we just refuse to acknowledge and confess? In fact, rather than acknowledging them, the tendency of the mainline Church is to move them from the “forbidden” column to the “permitted” column. And this on our own authority, not on God’s. We in effect have said to God, “I don’t think You understand modern psychology and the social complex of the modern world, so we need to fill You in a bit.”

But what has it gotten us to ignore the problem of sin? A message that is confused and ambiguous, a society that is violent and dysfunctional, a world that is dangerous and more and more capable of self-destruction.

The powerful truth of Psalm 32 is, in part, that unconfessed sin has serious consequences. David begins by acknowledging God’s forgiveness of his sins:

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him (vv. 1-2).

As David reflects on the power of forgiveness, he remembers his own experience of this wondrous transaction. He had gone through a time of unconfessed sin:

“When I kept silent,
my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night
Your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was sapped
as in the heat of summer” (vv 3-4).

One has to experience those burning, hot summers in the land of Israel to get the full measure of his metaphor. I remember being in Jericho with a group of students a few years ago, and as we looked from a distance over the modern and ancient cities of Jericho, it felt like someone was standing behind us with a blowtorch aimed at our legs. That’s how David’s unconfessed sins affected him.

David’s sins had caused him mental anguish and it evidently had brought on some kind of physical sickness. We know there is a connection between mind and body. Our minds can make us ill. We’ve heard some political confessing going on this past week. I don’t know whether the initial denial of sin produced any kind of physical sickness, but it certainly has its emotional and political consequences.

Can you imagine what would happen in our lives, what would happen in our country, if we reached way down into our hearts and confessed those sins that we have not

acknowledged. Some of us, I think, have tried, at least on a minor scale, to do what Martin Luther did. He was so conscious of his sin, before He discovered the miracle of grace and the power of forgiveness, that he would spend hours confessing his sins, and still feel that he had not quite completed the list.

One of the psalmist's problems was that, at a certain point in his life, he was unwilling to acknowledge his sin. It seems to me that this is the great need of the Church, and the great need of our society, and even of some of us. We won't admit that we are sinning against God. Everybody else is doing it, so we use the democratic principle of the majority to condone our behavior. If most Americans believe adultery is ok, just so you're not hurting somebody else, then by majority opinion, it must be ok.

Sometimes we use the term "credibility gap" to describe politicians who say one thing and do another, in other words, who lie—and politicians are not the only ones. This phrase means there is a gap between what they say and what they do. The historian Arnold Toynbee used the term "morality gap" to describe that gap between what we do and what we ought to do, or between what we ought to do and do not.² We have become too secular to draw on the vocabulary of the Christian faith, except in a flippant way, but it would be therapeutic if we could go back to the word "sin" and acknowledge its existence in our society and in our lives. If we could, I'm sure we would discover that saving truth that Paul expressed so beautifully, "Where sin doth abound, grace doth much more abound." We have to wonder if our society is not getting morally worse because we refuse to acknowledge our sin.

But here is the wonder that broke David's guilt, the divine transaction that changed his world: "Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him" (v. 2). That's the marvel that Paul also lays out in his Letter to the Romans. David was in fact echoing the LORD's words to Abraham in Gen. 15:6: "And Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness." Making his case that faith, not works, justifies, Paul quotes Psalm 32:

"However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works" (Rom. 4:5-6).

You see, the wonder of forgiveness is that our sins are no longer on the record book. When we open the record book and look at our page, and scan down the column, the wonder of forgiveness is that, where our sins were written, the entry is now "righteousness." It should have been listed as "lying," and instead the entry is "righteousness." It should have been written "malicious gossip," but instead the entry is "righteousness." We keep

² Arnold Toynbee, *Surviving the Future*, quoted by Menninger, pp. 226-227.

scanning down the column, and the long list of “righteousness” continues. What did we do? That’s not even the right question. The right question is, “What did God do?” He credited Abraham’s faith as “righteousness.”

He did not credit David’s sin against him. And Paul says that is the kind of grace God has extended to all believers in Jesus Christ. Paul puts the capstone on this idea in Rom.5:1-2: “Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.” God doesn’t hold our sins against us any longer. Rather through Jesus Christ, through His death on the cross, He has wiped our record clean of the sins which we have acknowledged and confessed, and has written in their place “righteousness,” which is another way of saying, “forgiven,” “acquitted.”

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, My glorious dress;
‘Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I Lift up my head.³

The psalm issues a sober word of warning to us. That’s good. It’s found in v 6: “Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you, while you may be found. . . .” The Scriptures teach that God is available to those who call upon him; yet on occasion, here in v 6, in fact, and in Isa 55:6, there seems to be some restriction on God’s availability. David admonishes the “godly” to pray “while you may be found”—the “you” is God—and this will turn the “mighty waters” in the opposite direction. The phrase “while you may be found,” suggests that there are times when God cannot be found. Sometimes it’s just our imagination, or our state of mind, when we feel estranged from God, and we say we just can’t find God. We feel like God is not listening, and the psalmists feel the need to ask him to listen, to have mercy, to intervene. So, admittedly, this expression may be more a description of the psalmist’s state of mind than God’s availability.

Yet, we must not dismiss this notion of God’s unavailability too quickly. Amos predicted a time when Israel would “stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it” (Am 8:12). On the other hand, Isaiah recognized that he prophesied at a time when the LORD “may be found” (Isa 55:6): “Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.” It’s quite possible that Isaiah was either referring to the temple, where the priestly word could be heard, or the availability of the prophet’s word. In any case, this phrase “while you may be found” should not be taken lightly. Whether it is a matter of God’s availability or our perceptibility, the biblical evidence indicates that there are seasons when God may not make himself

³ Nicolaus L. Zinzendorf, “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness.”

available to us. When we have continually spurned His grace, and consistently rejected His invitation to come to Him, God may make Himself unavailable.

Now is the day of salvation. Not tomorrow or the next day. “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me, though they had seen what I did” (Ps.95: 7c-9)

There is a point at which we can no longer recognize our sins, and thus no longer confess them. How close are we to that point in our history as a society, and our history as a denomination, and our history as individuals? I wonder if our society is not virtually at that point right now—we don’t think sin is such a big deal anymore. But don’t you think there is some connection between our behavior, whether we call it sin or not, and the terrible social and moral problems we now face in our world and in our society? Don’t you think there is a connection between a denomination that has been losing members since the 1960’s and can’t get its theology straight?

What we need is another Pentecost of empowerment for witness. But we can’t have another Pentecost until we repent. We can’t be filled with the Holy Spirit until our sins are forgiven. That’s the order the Apostle Peter laid out for us: “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” If we want to speak to this world and offer them the assurance of sins forgiven and the hope of heaven, we must be empowered by the Holy Spirit. But that won’t come until we repent. I’m talking about the Church universal, and about the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and about Warren Park, and about us personally. Can we acknowledge our sins of indifference toward God, of defiance of God’s moral laws, of thoughtless words and offensive attitudes? Can we acknowledge that we need to be refilled with the Holy Spirit for our task of witnessing to this community? Warren Park’s 85 years of ministry didn’t build a bank account of merits for us so that we can just withdraw from them and never have to make any deposits. God will hold us accountable if we do not fulfill *our* call like those of the past fulfilled theirs. While our God may be found, let’s call on Him. Isaiah’s words are quite appropriate for us as a church and as a society:

Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way
And the evil man his thoughts.
Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him,
And to our God, for he will freely pardon (Isa. 55:6-7).

Notes from Eric & Hope Prinkey...

Can you believe that half of 2011 is already over? The older we get the more quickly time seems to go. Scripture says, “What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes” (James 4:14 NIV). Life on earth is short. And, each day is a new gift from God. Why are we here? To love and serve God and others (see Luke 10:27). It’s not an easy task to fulfill in our own strength, but the good news is that as a disciple of Jesus, we have the powerful, Holy Spirit at our side to lead and to guide. And, so we look for His enablement even now as we as a church body go forth with many ministries in the month of July.

Neighborhood Movie Night, July 1, 7-9pm: This monthly ministry has been very successful in bringing in new faces from the community. We look forward to finding more ways to connect with our new friends and to share with them the love of Christ. We also enjoy fellowshiping as a church family during this time.

Children’s Arts Camp, July 7, 14, 21, 28, 1-3pm: We are holding this camp every Thursday in July for children ages 3-10. We look forward to not only helping children develop their creativity, but helping them to understand God’s greatest gift of all-Jesus Christ. Children will create many arts and crafts projects and learn some new songs and Bible stories.

We hope you will find a way to bring your children and/or grandchildren to this free event. If you are interested, please sign them up during church service on Sunday or email us the participating child’s name, age and contact information to eprinkey@warrenparkchurch.org.

Family Fun Fair, July 30, 1-4pm: We will have arts, crafts, games, illusions, face painting, food and much more at this first ever community event. It will be held both inside and outside of Warren Park. And, people of all ages are invited. If you are interested in helping out, please contact us. And, invite your friends and neighbors to come. You won’t want to miss it!

We hope you, your children or grandchildren can attend some or all of these exciting events. If not, we ask that you pray that they would draw us closer together as a church body and draw others to Christ.

Mission Report

Marlin and Sherry Leaders point us to Jer.33:11 and share photos from son Kyle and Amber's wedding in Seattle on May 21. Next to one photo is a captions that says granddaughter, Kaitlin is the group leader saying "cheese". The Leaders are happy that Kyle and Amber are putting Christ in their marriage and home. Daughter Ashley studied hard this year and has passed the Pharmacy tech certificate exam. Her husband, Thomas, is taking three more classes to complete his degree at U. of Texas. Sixteen students were graduated at GIAL's spring bimester which recently ended and 27 others earned degrees last December; in the Computer Data Management course students were challenged by studying Thai or one of two from Chad which are tonal languages. Martin's eyes continue to heal from cataract surgery but computer work is still stressful. He is looking forward to a visit from a French PhD student to learn about Bulo Stieng language. The Leaders thank us for our years of prayer and gifts and are praying for our church during this time of change in our denomination.

Speaking of weddings, we received a "Save the date" card and note from **David and Debbie Frank**. We have been so faithful to them they say, that we've become like extended family; when special days happen, they like to share them with us. Since she was born in Spain, the Franks have prayed for their daughter, Tami, as they did with the other children and we have prayed for her, too. This October 8th Tami and Alex Caruso will become Mr. and Mrs. in High Point, NC. What a happy wrap up to a busy camping season! Remember this couple and the Franks this season.

Paul and Ruth Philippi are blessed when people tell them about shared activities from years ago that touched their lives. Ruth has been feeling much better and they were able to attend their granddaughter, Lisa's, graduation in Virginia. Pray for a troubled young man named Sergio who attempted suicide. He asked God to forgive him and promised never to do it again. Paul and Ruth and another missionary are praying with him during visits to the hospital and he is improving. Jorge Castillo, son of a pioneer Guatemalan pastor, is a business man that contributes generously to the Lord's work. He has Parkinson's disease and asks for prayer for his health. Maximiliano is a poor man who lost his only Bible and says he misses his "Sword of the Spirit." Paul will bring a New Testament next Sunday. Philippi's ask that we pray they will be sensitive to opportunities to help and witness. We all need to do the same. Pray for Leslie who wants to join in the women's Bible study from her home. On a recent Thursday Ruth was waiting for the 12 women to arrive for Bible class now studying selected Psalms. Ruth was thankful it wasn't raining because most of the women have to walk quite a distance. Pray with them that this year's rainy season will not bring the destructive flooding of last year.

Hello and Blessings from **Norman and Gwen Bowman**. They are here in the United States from June until mid-January. They will be cooperating with Calvary Reformed Church, a supporting church, in a prayer/counseling ministry called Healing and Helping the Hurting in July, traveling during the month of August and back to Orland Park from September through mid-January. Since Calvary is providing their housing, mail can be sent to Norman and Gwen Bowman, c/o Calvary Church, 16100 S. 104th Ave., Orland Park, IL 60467. Pray for the Bowman's and those who come for healing, for safety in their travels and good times with family and friends. They are looking forward to seeing us this fall.

Elias and Julie Madeira remind us that while it is hot here it is winter in Brazil but the normal winter temperature is in the 50's with lots of rain. The children's club attendance is down—they think because of the weather and they plan to try starting later when the morning chill has gone. We are waiting to hear if they moved into their new apartment. Their new computer arrived and they are thankful to all who donated towards the purchase. Keep praying for them and all the ways they are able to show and teach God's love to children and families in Sao Paulo.

Wayne and Kitty Gute tell of ministries they started years ago in Guatemala that are still thriving and sharing hope with the Mam people there; of special interest is the message that the Juan (Jan) Hus evangelical clinic has been reopened by a Huehuetenango hospital with the new name of Huellas de Amor or fingerprints of love. Wayne and Kitty were married in the Central Presbyterian Church in Guatemala City on July 30, 1951. Their large family will arrive at Go Ye Village to celebrate their 60th Anniversary with them on the weekend of July 30th. Congratulations and God's blessings to a wonderful couple.

Kemmerer Village celebrates 97 years of opportunities for children and especially the positive changes in some of the proud graduates. Pray for these young people as they move into a new phase of life.

Donna Tulach
Missions Chairman