

## **Sin and Forgiveness**

*Sermon for the Parish of South Darebin, Easter 3, 2024  
Acts 3:12–20; Psalm 4; 1 John 2:15–17; 3:1–6; Luke 24: 36b–48*

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I remember a young woman who came to Evening Prayer in the Cathedral one Monday night. Throughout the whole service she sobbed quietly and uncontrollably a few rows from the front. One of the volunteers at the cathedral had noticed her and sat next to her, trying to comfort her. But she seemed inconsolable and would not speak. Once the service was over, I went and sat with her, suggesting that she may feel better if she could tell me what was troubling her. Through her tears, she eventually told me what was distressing her. She had been at her best friend's engagement party. She and others at the party had got drunk and in her drunken state, she had had sex with her best friend's fiancé. Her best friend found out and hated her for what she had done. Now she hated herself. She could not relieve herself of the guilt and sorrow she felt. She was in torment.

I remember a young man I was teaching in the 1980s who was in my Year 11 Chemistry class. Suddenly, he started sobbing and ran out of the room. Everyone was shocked. I went out into the corridor and spoke with him. He was the grandson of one of the school's board members and was seen as a model student, but it seemed that he had got in with a wrong group and for the past few months at the weekends had been with these others stealing cars, driving them down to the beach and pushing them over a cliff. Now the police had caught them and he was facing court, but far, far worse, he could not cope with the shame he felt at letting down his parents and grandparents. His sin was haunting him. He wanted to be released from its memory.

In Romans 3:23 it says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That means that you and I are sinners. No one is exempt. Some of us are troubled by our sin, as these two young people were. They had both hoped they could cover it up, but their sin still haunted them. I think that we all know that we sin from time to time. Often, we manage to hide our sin, and sometimes we just live with it and try to not let it worry us. I think it was Martin Luther who once observed that most sin is committed in private, which is probably so because human beings can't bear shame. While we get away with sin, while it is secret, we think we avert shame. But if it comes out into the open then shame engulfs us, especially if the sin is serious or considered to be so by others.

If we look carefully at our readings this morning, we can see that the connecting theme is forgiveness of sins, of the release from the shame of sin.

In the reading from Acts which recounts what happened just after Peter and John healed the lame man outside the temple, Peter accuses the Israelites: "you rejected the Holy and Righteous One {Jesus} and asked to have a murderer [Barabbas] given to you." Without pulling any punches, Peter says, "you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead."

He continues, "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his

Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus.” (Acts 3: 17 –20)

Repent – turn away from your sins – and turn to God so that your sins might be wiped out and times of refreshing may come. I don’t think that there is anything more wonderful than to have our sins wiped out. To be truly forgiven is a liberating experience!

In our psalm, the psalmist wrote ‘answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness; you set me at liberty when I was in trouble’. God gives us liberty – freedom – from trouble when we turn to him. How wonderful!

In our epistle reading, John contrasts the things of the world with the things of God. He marvels that as Christians we have been made God’s children, noting that ‘all who have hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.’ (1 John 3:3) Those whose trust is placed in the saving work of Jesus are made pure, just as he is pure. John further states that Christ was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin.

As we sang in our Gradual hymn,

*The great love of God is revealed in the Son  
Who came to this earth to redeem [save] everyone.*

Our Gospel reading this morning came from Luke’s Gospel and probably recounts the same resurrection appearance as we read about in last week’s Gospel from John. Jesus appeared to the disciples behind locked doors and showed them his wounds and ate a meal with them as proof that it was truly him and that he was truly alive. As Jesus spoke with them, he demonstrated to them what was written in the Scriptures of the day (that is our Old Testament) that the Messiah had to suffer and would rise from the dead on the third day and that “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:47)

One of the magnificent benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection is that we can be forgiven. Jesus died, once, for all, so that sins might be forgiven, and we can be made whole once more.

Almost the last words of the Prophet Micah, who wrote in the eighth century BC, are these:

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.  
(Micah 7: 18 – 19)

As a young teenager I remember singing a chorus based on this passage:

*Gone, gone, gone, gone, yes my sins are gone!  
Now my soul is free and in my heart’s a song!  
Buried in the deepest sea – Yes! That’s good enough for me.  
I shall live eternally, Praise God! My sins are gone.*

Friends, surely this is good news! We can be released from the shame and guilt of sin and be released to the refreshment and liberty of being made righteous before God through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.