

It's Not Cheap!  
Romans 5: 12-19

The front page of our bulletin and that bit of purple cloth on the cross serve to remind us that the Lenten season is upon us. Much like Advent, it is a season of preparation. For the next 6 weeks Christians across the globe will spend these 40 days in prayer, fasting and repentance, ending with the glory of Resurrection Sunday where we celebrate our redemption in Jesus Christ.

For some people the question is why. Why do we need Lent? Why can't we just skip right to the good part- Easter Sunday? All this talk about sin and the cross and death and dying is depressing. There is some truth to that. However, Easter Sunday is little more than a day for the Easter Bunny unless we comprehend just how much we need a resurrected Savior. As someone once said, denial is not just a river in Egypt but a symptom of the fallen human condition.

As we journey together through the Lenten season these next 36 days and 5 Sundays, my hope is that we will humbly acknowledge our need for a Redeemer and then boldly proclaim our Redeemer to be none other than Jesus the Christ. To those ends we begin this morning with a brief history lesson.

The passage that Susie read this morning is from the epistle (or letter) that the apostle Paul wrote to the early church in Rome while he was living in Corinth, a city in southern Greece. Paul does three things in this short passage that will be helpful to us in our Lenten journey. He defines what sin is, how it came about and how God will deal with it. Turn with me now to chapter 5 verse 12 where we find the definition of sin. The Greek word Paul uses for sin in that verse and 59 other places in the Scriptures is hamartia. **It literally means to miss the mark.** In biblical terms the word hamartia or sin means to miss or wander from the path of righteousness and honor, to do or go wrong. It means to err or to be mistaken. It means to violate or wander from God's law. It can also mean to have no share in, in other words to be left out. We will come back to that in a moment.

The picture Paul paints for us is that of an archer aiming for the target but the arrow misses. There are several things that can cause that to happen, including not focusing on the bullseye, having an unsteady hand, or using faulty equipment. The target is holiness, and at the center is the bullseye of Christian perfection. The same things that may cause an archer to miss the target will also cause us to miss our target. The world gives us so many attractive things to set our eyes upon it is easy to take our eyes off the target. The 5 big “P”s of power, pleasure, politics and personal preferences can all cause us to miss the mark.

An unsteady hand that is weak from a lack of practice also will not hit the target. Strength comes from exercise and repetition, and Christians who don’t consistently practice the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, Bible study and gathering for worship every Sunday with other believers will not only miss the target of holiness, they won’t even know where to find it.

Faulty equipment is also a problem. If the arrow is bent or the bow is weak accuracy is impossible. When it comes to human equipment, our sinful nature will cause us all to miss the target from time to time. It’s a universal problem. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Regardless of the cause, the effect is always the same. We miss the target and the arrow falls short. To sum it up, sin is anything less than holiness. **It results in death.**

Next Paul proceeds to remind us how sin came about. Sin entered the world through one man- Adam. You know the story- God told Adam and Eve they could eat anything they wanted from the garden. God also gave them strict orders that they weren’t to touch the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam’s wife Eve is deceived by Satan’s lie that God wouldn’t mind and picks a piece of fruit from the forbidden tree and eats it, and while she is at it brings a piece home for her husband for him to eat as well. As a result, God was not happy.

Even though Adam and Eve both disobeyed God and ate from the tree God held Adam primarily accountable. The Bible says he “hamartano”- he missed the mark-he erred.

He chose to violate God's law, which then allowed sin and its terrible consequences to enter the world. Through one man, sin entered the world, and death entered the world through that sin. The first creatures to die should have been Adam and Eve but God spared them and offered them a second chance. The word for that is grace- and instead an animal lost its life so its skin could be used to cover their sin. They were the most expensive leather coats ever made. Adam and his wife were banished from the garden and would eventually suffer death as a result of their disobedience. We may or may not agree that they did or didn't get what they deserved and perhaps some would object that it wasn't fair for the animal to lose its life. But the bigger problem for others is the latter part of verse 12 where Paul clearly states that death spread to all because all *have sinned*-hamartano. It is past tense, and the inference is that the sinful nature of Adam and Eve is passed down through their offspring. In other words, because of *their* disobedience *then*, sin is part of *our* DNA *now*. It doesn't seem fair. After all we weren't the ones that picked the fruit or decided to eat it. Why is God punishing us for the sins of another, especially someone whom we have never even met that lived more than 5000 years ago?

The answer to that difficult question may be found in what I said earlier about shifting blame and denial. Because of our fallen nature it is hard to admit that we've done wrong and even when we do, we often blame our actions on someone else. Though it might not seem fair or just, the reality is that sin is anything but fair or just and it will have far reaching consequences. In fact, if we are honest with ourselves, we will have to admit that our own sinful actions have affected others in terrible ways that they don't deserve. Though we might legitimately debate and seek answers as to *why* we sin, in the end we still must acknowledge that regardless of the reason the fact is that we *do* sin. And unless we are willing to admit that truth and seek forgiveness, there will be a penalty. The wages of sin is death. To use another meaning of the word hamartia we will be left out of the kingdom of God.

Paul has defined sin and how it came about. He now turns his attention to the plan God has for dealing with it. For those of us who are less concerned with the cause of sin and more concerned with learning how to overcome it, that is good news. God's plan to deal with sin and its terrible effects may be summed up in a word- grace. Grace is God offering us a second chance to retrieve our arrow that missed the target by a mile to try again. And like many of the best things in life like love, peace and joy it is a free gift.

Just as death came to all through one person in Adam, the gift of God's grace is made available to all through one person- Jesus Christ. Adam was the epitome of disobedience. He had everything, more than any of us could ever imagine and yet he chose disobedience. Jesus on the other hand chose to lower Himself and give up everything he had, including his life, in obedience to the Father. He died so that human sin might be forgiven and salvation made possible. Eugene Peterson puts it this way in his paraphrase of the Scriptures: One man said no to God and put many people in the wrong; one man said yes to God and put many in the right.

That is good news for us as we contemplate sin, death, judgment, redemption and resurrection this Lenten season. **The truth is we can not change why we sin, but we can choose to allow Christ to help us overcome it.** We can choose to admit we miss the target more than we hit it. We can choose to admit we need God's help in improving our aim, strengthening our hand and focusing our attention on the target- the holiness and righteousness of Christ. His help is freely offered, and the lessons are freely given, available for the asking. God's grace is a gift, and it is not cheap. It comes at a price, and Jesus paid for it at Calvary.

During this Lenten season I encourage you to share this good news with somebody and have them know they too can have a second chance. Let us continue to pray for those who have said no thanks that they might see the light of Christ and experience His love. We also pray this morning that those of us who have accepted the gift will not be satisfied until we hit the mark perfectly in the center every time. We pray for these needs in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen