

“THE PARADOX: SIN AND BLESSING”

Proper 12B July 26, 2009

Introduction:

Our Gospel lesson tells us of “signs” being accomplished through Jesus’ ministry. These miracles were signs of God’s approval and witnesses that the Kingdom of God was “at hand”. God’s blessings are available to us all, and are signs that God loves us.

When I was reading, studying, and praying about the lessons for this week, I was struck with the notion of a fundamental Biblical paradox. A paradox is like a railroad track. A railroad track is two rails running parallel to each other, held apart by the crossties so that they never touch or cross over each other.

In the Bible there are numerous paradoxes portrayed: two truths running parallel to each other, but held apart so that they never touch, thereby losing the value of each separate truth. The paradox in this week’s lessons is this: human sin and God’s blessings run side by side throughout life. Each is true in its own right. For example, all around us, every day, the Lord is doing miracles – EVERY DAY! That is a truth.

Parallel to that truth is this fact: All around us, every day, people are sinning – sometimes, it is even you and me committing the sin, right?

Here is another illustration of that paradox.

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God's love for each one of us, exemplified by miraculous actions on our behalf, is poured out on each of us. Yet, our rebellion against God, characterized by our sinful thoughts, words, and actions, or failures to act when prompted by God, keeps washing off the love of God, thus minimizing the miracles. The truth is,

We Live In A Paradoxical World; and Are Ourselves, Living Paradoxes.

King David is known in the Bible as a *“man after God's own heart”*. To me, that means he was serious about fulfilling the Shemah. The Shemah was the great call to worship that developed in the life of Israel, recorded in Deuteronomy. It is a “confession in the unity of God”. It draws its name from the opening Hebrew word. It goes like this: *4“Hear (Shemah), O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; 5and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

David truly sought to love the Lord his God, with his entire heart, soul, and strength. Just read the Psalms and you know David loved God. Yet, - and here is the paradox – he was still capable of sin. We read today: The army was at battle, but the King remained behind in Jerusalem. He goes up on the roof of the palace late one

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afternoon. He is walking around, perhaps thinking through some issue with the war against the Ammonites. His gaze looks across the roofs and he notices a beautiful woman bathing.

There is no sin in noticing – if it had ended there. But, it didn't, did it. He inquired about her – that was possibly sinful. David was married, but as the King, he could have as many wives as he wanted. But when he found out she was also married he should have turned his mind back to the original problem. But, he didn't. He lusted for her. He had her brought from her home to his where he began an affair with her that resulted in her becoming pregnant. David had now clearly sinned.

But, he is not through sinning. Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, is a soldier in the King's army. David brings him back to Jerusalem on the pretense of gathering information from him. He then instructs Uriah to go home, hoping he will sleep with Bathsheba, and the child she is carrying can be credibly viewed as Uriah's. It seemed like a good way out of a sinful situation.

Only Uriah has too much integrity. He refuses to go home and enjoy his wife while the army is sleeping out on the ground. The second day David gets him drunk and again dismisses him knowing he will, for sure, go

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home to be with Bathsheba. Only, Uriah still has too much integrity to be drawn into David's sin. Then David takes the only option left for him other than confession. He sends secret orders to Joab, the commander of the army to place Uriah at the front of the fiercest fighting, then draw back from him so he will certainly be killed. And Uriah is killed in battle. Now David is free to act graciously by taking Bathsheba as his wife, thus providing for the widow of one of his nation's fallen soldier's.

How many sins do you suppose were involved in all that intrigue? As far as David knew, he had gotten away with it; only God sees everything, and knows all our secret sins.

Here is another illustration of the paradox. Out of that sinful union between David and Bathsheba, God acts mercifully and raises up one of their sons – Solomon – to become the greatest king in Israel's history. Sin always has consequences. David's sin with Bathsheba costs two human lives; yet, God blessed David in spite of his sin. It is the paradox of Sin and blessing, running side by side through each person's life; through each nation's life. Sin, the product of human failing; and blessings from God, who is ever merciful despite our sin, existing side by side on the railroad track of life.

So, Who Is Immune From Sin?

The simple answer is NO ONE. From today's Psalm, the first three verses, we read: ¹*The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, **there is none that does good.*** ²

The LORD looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any that act wisely, that seek after God. ³***They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is none that does good, no, not one.***

St. Paul restated this point in Romans 3:23 (KJV): ²³*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; We are sinners – all of us. The only distinction is degree. Some of us might be able to say, "I'm less of a sinner than you are", but none of us can say we are without sin. Yet God still seeks to bless us because God still loves us – even in our sin.*

Another illustration of the paradox: We are sinners; yet, as Jesus taught, God *makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* You may not like the tension we live in – the paradox that we sin and God blesses us – even us sinners; but it is true. God created this tension to teach us

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about His great love, grace and mercy; and to remind us sinners not to judge the souls of other people lest we also be judged accordingly.

One final illustration of the paradox I want to mention this morning. It is

The Paradox of a Church That Is Sinful and A God Who Loves Continues To Bless Through It.

For the past two Sundays we have been praying for the General Convention of The Episcopal Church. Today, at 2:00 p.m., at the Cathedral in Orlando there will be a debriefing of what took place; and all are invited to attend.

The paradox is that the institutional Episcopal Church acts in sinful ways; yet, there are many congregations, and a few Dioceses like ours, where God's grace abounds, the Gospel is boldly proclaimed, and lives are changed for eternity.

Perhaps I have a simplistic faith. Part of it comes from having read, and studied, the entire Bible. I've read the entire book, and you know what the last chapter says? God wins! That means I have interest in decisions reached at General Convention but I don't think that I allow them to dwell oppressively in my heart. I have

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come to the decision that I will not allow General Convention to ruin my faith! God wins, and I believe this congregation, and this diocese can be part of God's victory. I do not believe that it is simplistic to believe that God still plans great things for his church. Jesus wins and indeed has won. Holy Cross Church is an exciting and vibrant place to worship, serve, and proclaim the Gospel, and it will continue to be so. You may all be comforted and assured of that.

But we live paradoxically. The Christian Church is losing the culture wars because we trying to be all things to all people by reinterpreting clear teachings of Scripture and by ignoring laws in existence regarding behavior in the church. So, if sex isn't precisely the problem, what is? The answer: Authority and Ecclesiology.

What is the Church, and where does it get its authority? That is where the fault line actually is to be found in the National Church. The Episcopal Church is now seriously divided between trying to be both Congregational and Catholic.

Protestant Congregationalists can have all the diversity they please, because there is no "higher" authority than each local congregation; or in our situation

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the local Bishop. Catholic Christians are “Catholics” precisely because they believe in a Catholic or universal and common faith held by all people, at all times in all places. We cannot have it both ways. We cannot claim to be a part of the world-wide Anglican Communion, and at the same time reject with callous impunity the feelings and sensibilities of the vast majority of the family... or if we do, we should not be surprised if there are consequences.

So what next? A response from the Archbishop of Canterbury will surely follow. There will be much conversation and meeting. In short, nothing will radically change, until it does. In the meantime, this Diocese, and Holy Cross Church, shall do as we ever do: celebrate the Holy Mysteries, preach the Word urgently, in season and out, love God with all our heart... and try as very best we can, to love all our neighbors as ourselves. Sinful though we be, yet we are blessed by God in order to be a blessing to others. So, let us receive God’s blessings, and become dispensers of blessings to others.

It is the paradox of sin and blessing.