

“Wilderness of Sin”

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen

Exodus Chapter 17, Verse 1 “From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded.”

Today we will, as a whole congregation, journey by stages from the wilderness of Sin. For this journey is the one of the experiences of Lent, to acknowledge that we find ourselves in Sin and to move forward as the Lord commands.

When we come to church to celebrate the Eucharist, we are attending to a right relationship with God. Throughout the service there are touchpoints of image, prayer, music, and actions which move us to a deeper and truer faith.

As we turn the leaflet page by page, the movements of the Eucharist may feel like a straight line. I suggest we think of the service as a journey out of the wilderness. Like any journey, there are highs and lows – moments when we know where we are going and moments when we are lost. Each of these moments in the Eucharistic journey bring us closer and closer to being in right relationship with God.

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Let's begin with the low point of the journey, the act of sin. I have been reading theology about sin over last few weeks. It is hard to read and think about sin, as deep attention to sin has made me mindful...mindful of my own sinfulness and how far I have yet to go.

What are our sins? We have language for sin – to make acts of omission and commission, to engage in the seven deadly sins, to break the ten commandments, to not love our neighbors as we love ourselves. The range of possibilities can immobilize us with guilt.

Pause for a moment and reflect on times of sin, both individually and collectively...what are the characteristics of our reflections about sin?

My sense is there are two common characteristics – we have done something wrong and we are distanced from one another and from God.

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These are two primary domains of sin theology – the legalistic school (we have done something wrong) and the relationship school (being distanced from God) Both a legalistic view and a relationship view of sin result in alienation –

- Alienation from our better selves
- Alienation from each other, and
- Alienation from God.

Acknowledging our alienation can be hard. We have many means and manners of refusing to acknowledge we are alienated. Here are a few:

- **It (the sin) was no big deal...**
This is the minimization approach.
- **You don't just don't understand what I meant.**
This is the blame game, it's your fault, not my fault.

And also....

- **Well, it's not my responsibility.**
This is a deflection statement, used particularly when encountering a societal wrong.

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Given how many ways we alienate ourselves, even knowing we are alienated is challenging. We have to hold in our hearts, minds, and souls a clear understanding of what it means to be in right relationship.

Our right relationship with God is renewed each time we enter this church and see the baptismal font. It is through baptism that our relationship with God is declared. In the baptismal covenant we recite our beliefs (as expressed through the creed) and then we affirm a set of actions. Specifically, the celebrant asks “Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?” We answer in unison “I will with God’s help”

The **Eucharistic** service begins with the procession (al hymn). The cross leads our attention to the altar, and we sing in praise. The cross reminds us of the sacrifice of the crucifixion and the procession focuses us on the gift of the Last Supper.

The **Collect** brings us together and sets the tone for our celebration. Last week’s Collect spoke directly to our sinful natures and said “be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways, and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word...”

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Through the **Kyrie Eleison** we sing “Lord have Mercy, Christ have Mercy.” We are plaintively voicing our need for mercy...we are calling out from the wilderness of sin.

The **Readings**, which are of various literary forms, are about people learning to be with God and moving through and beyond their own challenges and confusion. We call the readings “Lessons” because they teach us about being in right relationship with God. In the Readings, we find the sinful acts, admission of fault, penitence, forgiveness, and redemption. What we take from the Readings, and the **Sermon** that follows, is to acknowledge that we are like the people in the lessons – we are removed from God, struggling on our journey to be with God.

We then move to the **Creed**. I think of the Creed as a great moment of comfort. We recite the Creed together as “we believe”. I can lean on each of you in my moments of doubt. Woven into the creed are statements of incalculable generosity – “for us and for our salvation he came.” ...” we acknowledge the one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.”

The **Prayers of the People** precede the **Confession**; with these prayers we beseech God for mercy, over and over.

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The **Confession** is a corporate act; it lays out all we have not done. We say the confession together.

If you turn the confession around from the HAVE NOT to the HAVE ACCOMPLISHED, we can find the way to be in right relationship.

- We have sinned against you, opposing your will in our lives...
What if we do not sin...and follow God’s will?
- We have denied your goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world, you have created.
What if we affirm God’s goodness in each other, in ourselves, and in the world, God has created?

And yet confession is not enough. We have to act differently. Repentance is more than an apology or a confession...to repent requires that we change.

We have to not sin and let go of the power or pleasure we associate with the sin.

And then, perhaps hardest of all, we have to repair the damage we caused.

It is more than an apology, that is only the beginning. To repent we have to repair our relationship with others and God; we cannot do this alone.

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Through the **Eucharist** our relationship with God is repaired. We are saved from our sins by Jesus’ selfless act.

We acknowledge the gift of salvation with the declaration...

DYING YOU DESTROYED OUR DEATH,

RISING, YOU RESTORED OUR LIFE.

JESUS CHRIST COME IN GLORY.

Before we move to the altar table, we say the **Lord’s Prayer**, asking for care and guidance. “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

As we are invited to **Communion**, the congregation surges to the table to receive the gifts. We are all together, acknowledging we have been saved.

Through the **Post-Communion prayer**, we take up our responsibility to accept salvation and take that gift into the world. My favorite final prayer is when we say “And now, O God, send us out to do the work you have given us to do.” We are sent on our way, renewed in our journey to be with God.

March 12, 2023
Sermon on Sin
Eugenie Dieck

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During Lent, what is the joy of talking about sin? We will all sin in the coming week. The joy of Lent, and every Sunday, is that we are invited back to this blessed waystation.... to continue our journey out of our sin-filled wilderness by celebrating the Eucharistic again and again.

Each time, we will we bring the weight of our sins, we will admit our faults, we will be penitent, we will ask forgiveness, and we will be saved by God’s love expressed through Jesus Christ. Then we will go back to into the world to continue the journey and do the work God has given us to do, to share the joy of Lent.

AMEN