

## **Our sinfulness and our blessedness**

First Sunday in Lent

February 22, 2026

As we enter this Lenten Season, let us face honestly our brokenness and sinfulness. But let us never lose sight of our blessedness, of the glory that resides within each of us as children of God, as those made in the very image and likeness of God. This morning we're going to look at our sinfulness and our blessedness. But here is my disclaimer; I am no scholarly theologian. In fact, many of these individuals can do cartwheels around me any day! But this won't keep me from talking about this subject this morning.

In the Book of Genesis we heard of the fall of Adam and Eve: "The Lord God commanded the man, saying...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die... when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate." In that moment we are told that sin entered the human race.

In the Great Litany we cried out to God: "Remember not, Lord Christ, our offenses, nor the offenses of our forefathers; neither reward us according to our sins. Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people...From all evil and wickedness; from sin; from the crafts and assaults of the devil; and from everlasting damnation. From all blindness of heart; from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy; from envy, hatred, and malice; and from all want of charity.

From all inordinate and sinful affections; and from all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil. From all false doctrine, heresy, and schism; from hardness of heart, and contempt of thy Word and commandment. From all oppression, conspiracy, and rebellion; from violence, battle, and murder; and from dying suddenly and unprepared, *Good Lord, deliver us. Good Lord, deliver us. Good Lord, deliver us.*

Yes, you and I need to be delivered. We need deliverance because we are possessed by many inordinate passions and desires and longings and drives; those things that often cling to us and corrupt us and warp up into less than holy creatures.

It is the realization of our sin that leads us to weekly plead to God, in the words of the Rite I Prayer of Confession: “We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, which we from time to time most grievously have committed, by thought, word, and deed, against thy divine Majesty, provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, most merciful Father.” Why DO we struggle so much? Why are we so selfish and angry and prideful and envious and greedy and lustful and glutinous? Where does it all come from?

The apostle Paul answered these questions: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, [Adam,] and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned...death reigned from Adam to

Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam.” Paul was telling us that the disobedience of Adam lay at the root of all our sin. Because of Adam, corruption has reigned; death has reigned.

As the fourth century of the Common Era was winding down, the great bishop and theologian Augustine of Hippo was wrestling with these weighty matters as well. As he dug into the scriptures; into Genesis with its story of Adam’s fall, and Paul’s writings, he clarified a doctrine of sin. He wrote this: “because of Adam[’s fall, our]human nature requires a physician, because it is not healthy...the weakness which darkens and disables [us]...[came] from original sin...For this reason our guilty nature is liable to a just penalty.” Augustine was saying that Adam’s disobedience to God was the original sin that spread like a cancer, corrupting us, and making our human nature unhealthy.

But Augustine neglected to present a strong counterbalancing view of the goodness of creation as well. The beginning of Genesis records that on the sixth day of creation “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” God didn’t say that creation was, just okay. Nor just pretty good. God said that all creation, including all of humanity, was VERY good.

How do we work together Augustine’s doctrine of original sin with our inherent very-goodness? You’ll be glad to know that I’m not going to spend the time needed this morning to answer this question! But I will bring up a response a theologian at the time gave to Augustine’s statement of original sin. Across the Mediterranean in Rome, Pelagius pushed back on

Augustine's ideas. He wrote: "Everything good and everything evil, in respect of which we are either worthy of praise or of blame, is done by us, not born with us. We are not born in our full development, but with a capacity for good and evil; we are begotten as well without virtue as without vice, and before the activity of our own personal will, there is nothing in man but what God has stored in him." He was saying that none of us are born with some kind of corruption buried deep within our DNA. No sin, and no glory, were passed down to us. We are born only with what God has stored within us. The scriptures tell us that we are all born in the very image and likeness of God. And in that likeness, as we grow, we have the potential to be shaped by circumstances and events towards either good or evil. In other words, in answer to the question whether it is nature or nurture, the answer with respect to sin, is nurture.

It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word for sin isn't even found in the first three chapters of Genesis. And Rabbi Simon Jacobsen said: "The concept of 'Original Sin' does not exist in Judaism." In fact, Christianity, and only the western version of Christianity is the only religious group in the world that believes in a doctrine of original sin. The eastern Christian church; the Orthodox church; does not hold this doctrine. It adheres to original blessing.

So, what does this deep dive into the doctrine of original sin or original blessing have to do with our day to day lives; with how we live and practice our faith? Let me first emphasize the reality that being born from God's blessing and not from sin, does not free us to do whatever we want. It does

not set us free from the obligation to face our sins and imperfections. It is always good and right to face and acknowledge our brokenness and sin, and to speak at times of our wretchedness and blindness of heart and to recite the Great Litany. But we can go overboard by wallowing in our sinfulness. It can be unhealthy.

An example of taking our sinfulness too far may be found in the first stanza of the hymn "Alas, and did my savior bleed." It says: "Alas! and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die! Would he devote that sacred head for sinners such as I?" An earlier version of the hymn ends: "for such a worm as I?" Are we sinners, or are we worms? Now, I could argue that it might be much better, and more sacred to be considered a simple pure worm, than a sinner. But in our culture, the word "worm," used in this context, usually connotes a slimy grimy earthy dirty creature. So, being a worm is not a good thing.

Historically, the Christian church has used the doctrine of original sin and sin management as a way to control the masses, and to weigh them down with excessive guilt and shame. But there ARE certain sins of omission and commission, that bring harm not only to individuals, but they can also infect an entire family or a religious community. There are times when these sinful matters need to be addressed. And yet, this work is always done in love, never to induce shame, or to control individuals, but as a way of restoration and guidance towards further transformation into the image of Jesus Christ.

Some people need to face honestly their flaws and imperfection. But others need to be set free of the weight of the guilt and shame they carry around with them like a millstone around their neck. They need to celebrate their blessedness.

Yes, we must face our sin. But we must also face our blessedness.