

Sin and Grace

On Sun. Oct. 4th (the Gospel text was Mark 10:2-16, Jesus addresses the issue of marriage and divorce) I shared my view on the resolutions about human sexuality that had passed at the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis in August. The following is a modified version of my address from that morning.

In preparation for my class on Christian key doctrines, I have been thinking about sin a lot lately. About sin **and** grace. Let me start by saying: We cannot **not** sin. Sin is a part of our nature. It is a part of our human condition. Through our sinful condition, we are separated from God. As a consequence of this separation, we cannot completely fulfill God's law, which conversely becomes evident in our actions.

In Mark 10, Jesus is asked about marriage and divorce. When we talk about marriage, we think – for the most part – in traditional terms, as a union between one man and one woman, ordained and blessed by God. What God has brought together, no one should put asunder, was Jesus response. The couple is supposed to live together until death parts them. Does this mean that a marriage can never be separated? What do we, as a church, tell people who live, for instance, in an abusive marriage relationship? Do we tell them to stay in this relationship, to not divorce, in order to not sin against God? This would be a cruel thing to do.

Unfortunately, part of our experience as social beings is that we live in broken relationships. We are sinful beings and we live in sin. Sin is everywhere. We are infested by sin. As a result, people hurt other people. Nations rise up against nations. Human beings revolt against God. The results of these behaviors can be – but are not limited to – divorce and war. The result of our rebellion against God is (continued) expulsion from Paradise. In biblical terms, since the Fall into sin (see Genesis 3), we live outside Paradise, outside the place of perfect union between the Creator and the created. All of the above is important in order to understand what I want to say next. Although, I am not quite clear about my own position because I am still wrestling with the issue. It is a very complex matter. And I do not claim that I can offer you the ultimate word of wisdom.

PASTOR'S MESSAGE continued: SIN AND GRACE

Again, as a church and as believers, we deal with and we are confronted with sin. We deal with the "problem" of divorce. Now we also deal with the "problem" of alternative forms of marriage, unions between couples of the same sex.

You are probably aware by now that the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis passed a number of resolutions that give room within ELCA congregations to modify the policy and the stance on same-sex unions and pastors (and other church leaders) in a committed same-sex relationship. The whole issue has not been one of my priorities in my ministry. It has not been a priority in our ministry at Vashon Lutheran Church. Still, what are the implications of these resolutions? Mainly, there are three options. ELCA congregations are now free to ...

- teach that homosexual behavior is not sinful;
- call pastors in a same-sex relationship;
- bless (or marry) same-sex couples in their churches.

Pretty much every congregation can now decide for itself how it wants to deal with the issue without facing disciplinary consequences.

Personally, I am facing a dilemma. I wish I could call it by a different name, but biblically speaking, homosexuality is a sin (sociologically, for example, it might be a different matter), just as are divorce, adultery, sexual immorality, or other forms of transgressions. Yet I can also see how persons in a same-sex relationship can be a blessing for and to each other. But I cannot perform a blessing or marriage ceremony for same-sex couples because it is lacking the biblical mandate. However, we cannot conclude by saying that all "straight" couples are without sin. Clearly, they are not. They are also "guilty" of sin. For where people live together, people get hurt as a result of sin.

In Jesus' days, lepers were considered ceremonially unclean. Their leprosy was believed to be the punishment for their sin. Because of their leprosy they were not only excluded from the community at large, but they were also not allowed to participate in worship. Jesus, on the other hand, did something outrageous. He was not afraid of lepers. He approached them. He even touched them. He was able to heal some of them. And with all that he indicated that they were not God's forgotten children. God cared (and cares) through Jesus for the lepers. It seems that the lepers in today's society and the churches are those individuals who live (openly) in same-sex relationships. They are shunned. They are not welcome in many religious communities.

Part of me wants to cry out, "Enough. Why this obsession with homosexuality?" The whole issue has caused a lot of damage: there are people who leave their communities of faith because churches are hostile to homosexuals. There are others who leave their communities of faith because these churches seek to include homosexuals in their assemblies. Both responses are, in my view, rather immature because neither approach cares to deal with the tension between sin and grace. We need to keep in mind that homosexual people are not the only sinners. Because we all are sinners. And as such we all depend on God's grace.

This brings me to the next point. I said I have reflected a lot about sin. But I have also reflected a lot about grace. *If there were no sin, we would need no grace.* Without sin we would not need a Savior. I would have a difficult time believing in a God who takes delight in condemning what he has so beautifully created. Even though we act contrary to God's will, we still live in and under God's grace! For that matter, we should consider what it means that God has given us a way of reconciling us (the sinners) to himself (the righteous and holy One). We believe in justification by faith. This means, we are saved not through our own doing, but through the work of Christ Jesus, who died on the cross for our sins. With this in mind, we need to embrace the notion that we live by God's grace and are made righteous because of God's grace. Grace is God's work in response to our state of sinfulness.

It grieves me when churches single out homosexuality – as if it were the worst of sins. It is too narrow a thought when we try to confine sin in terms of sexuality only. It also grieves me that some Lutherans, even entire congregations, have opted to leave the ELCA. By leaving the ELCA the "problem" does not go away. Even though I do not fully agree with the resolutions, I, for my part, can live in and with a church that wants to reach out to people who live in a same-sex relationship instead of point-blank condemning them. Even though set apart for a special call to ministry, pastors (and other church leaders) are also sinners. With that, I can accept it when a congregation calls a pastor who lives in a same-sex relationship.

In contrast, I could never be a part of a church that abandons the trinitarian faith; neglects the preaching of and the distinction between Law and Gospel; or fails to put sin and grace in proper relation to each other. In the end, we are not saved through our sexuality, but through our faith in Christ Jesus, as the Messiah and the Son of God, who came into the world to embrace the sinner and bring him and her back into the presence of God – to restore the perfect unity which had been lost with (and since) the Fall.

I have always cherished in Lutheran theology the ability to deal with the tension between sin and grace. It seems to me that in recent years, we have lost some of this ability. It is time that we, as Lutherans, do not only put again a strong emphasis on teaching grace, but also assure ourselves of continually living in God's grace. May this be a time in which the grace of God will become manifest when we engage in mutual and respectful conversation on the topic. Yours in Christ,

Bjoern E. Meinhardt, Pastor

STANDARD TIME BEGINS NOVEMBER 1ST.

Set your clock BACK one hour on Nov. 1st (or arrive an hour early for church).

CELEBRATION OF FULL COMMUNION

This year the ELCA Church-wide Assembly passed an agreement of full communion with the United Methodist Church. Here on Vashon we will engage in a celebration of full communion at Vashon United Methodist Church on November 1st at 10:30am. We will begin the service at the Vashon Methodist Church & then process to our church for communion, benediction, and fellowship.

BIBLE STUDY ON SCIENCE AND FAITH

Pastor Bjoern will offer a Bible study on science and faith on Sunday mornings at 9:15. The class will start on November 15th.

FOOD BANK GARDEN

On Sat. Nov. 7th and the 14th (which ever meets your schedule) come join in the clean-up of the garden. We'll meet at 9:30am to get it ready for next Spring and will have a pot of soup and home-made bread for lunch.

CHRIST THE KING (Rite of Remembrance) SUNDAY

We will have a Rite of Remembrance on Sunday, November 22nd. If a loved one has died in the past year (since Nov. 23rd) please contact Pastor Bjoern.

IFCH SPONSORED DINNERS

This year again VLC will again participate in providing the IFCH Community Dinners for the homeless. We will prepare and serve five dinners during the first five Tuesdays and Thursdays in December, (1st, 3rd, 8th, 10th and 15th). There is a sign-up sheet in the Fellowship Hall. For more information, contact Jim Dam, 567-5279.

NICK & DEBBIE SIEMENS OF TRANS WORLD RADIO TO SPEAK

Both Nick and Debbie Siemens of Trans World Radio (TWR) will join us for worship on Nov. 15th and share what God is doing within the countries of the former Soviet Union.

TWR has been involved in Christian radio broadcasting since 1954. In 1958 Nick joined them

when the Russian department was added. The production of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus programs slowly moved east eventually reaching the Afghanis. The Central Asian Ministries was started in 2000 and there are now offices within the Central Asian region. The Word is proclaimed in nine different languages. Nick is involved with frequencies, internet and other areas in ministry coordination. Debbie is an assistant to the coordinator.

WORSHIP AT THE COMMUNITY CARE CENTER

Our next worship at the Care Center is November 22 at 9:15am. If you would like to participate, contact Pastor Bjoern.

JESUS, JUSTICE, JAZZ TOUR

Trinity Lutheran College is hosting an evening of entertainment on Nov. 14th at 7pm. Christian artists David Scherer (Agape) and Rachel Kurtz will perform. The performance is free, but a contribution to support ELCA world hunger efforts is requested. The event is at the Historic Everett Theatre 2911 Colby Ave. Everett.

THANKSGIVING SERVICE

There will be an ecumenical Thanksgiving Service at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit on Wednesday evening Nov. 25th. Call church for time.

ADVENT STARTS NOVEMBER 29TH

We will start the new liturgical year the end of November. Our first soup dinner and devotional will be Weds. Dec. 2nd at 6:00pm. Mark your calendars.

COMPASS CENTER CHRISTMAS GIFT DRIVE

To help make Christmas joyful for the people the Center serves, the Compass Center has provided a wish list, which includes such items as gift certificates to grocery stores, sweatshirts, hats, gloves, etc. The full list is on the table in the Fellowship Hall. The gifts need to be received by the Center by Dec. 18th. For more information, call Andrea Steele at 206-357-3138.

WOMEN'S BIBLE STUDY GROUP

There will be no meeting in November. We will have a potluck in early December. Date to be set.

BOOK OF FAITH WORKSHOP

The workshop will be lead by Rev. Geo. Nickelsburg, on Nov. 1, 8, 15 (12:30-2:30pm) at Central Lutheran Church, 1710 – 11th Ave. Seattle. The three sessions will concentrate on the book of Luke.

LUTHERAN BIBLE TRANSLATORS

Margot McMillen, former missionary to Guatemala, will be the guest speaker at a luncheon on Nov. 16th at noon, Holiday Inn, 1801 – 12th Ave. NW, Issaquah. Learn how LBT missionaries are making a difference in the lives of people around the world! For reservations call 1-800-532-4253 by Nov. 11th.

AN ELECTRONIC MOUSE IN 2010

In January of next year The Church Mouse will go electronic. There will be three ways in which you can receive it.

1. You can go the our website at www.vashonlutheranchurch.org or
2. You can sign-up to have it e-mailed to you or
3. You can sign-up to continue to have a hard copy mailed to your home address. *You need to contact the church office to have the Church Mouse mailed to you or to give your e-mail address. You can e-mail your wish to VLC98070@centurytel.net. (VLC is case sensitive so use capital letters).*

THRIVENT FINANCIAL OFFERS CHOICE

Starting in 2010 a new program, Thrivent Choice, will be offered. It is designed to give members choice, and for eligible members, one of the choices will be directing charitable funds to your congregation. In addition, all adult benefit and associate members will be able to vote on how to direct charitable funding among a short list of national charities. For more information about the program: www.thrivent.com/ThriventChoiceInfo.

A SERVICE of PRAYER and HEALING

We will have the opportunity to quietly gather for prayer and healing in the Lutheran church sanctuary from 6 – 6:30 p.m. the first Sunday of each month. *Our next service will be **November 1st at 6pm.***

Regardless of who you are and what you carry, you are welcome in this place. Come to pray aloud or silently.

Come forward to be prayed for through naming your concerns or retaining your silence.

Or...simply come to sit for a while and unwind with your own thoughts.

No pressure, no intrusion...A simple service without music...without liturgy...in a candle-lit sanctuary where we gather to hear a few readings, pray and be prayed for, and sit and just be.

The Rev. Jeff Larson, Ph.D. is a Lutheran minister and clinical psychologist called by Vashon Lutheran Church to provide counseling services to the community. As a member of the body of believers he feels that spiritual health in its many shapes and forms is key to attaining psychological and physical health.

LESSONS FOR NOVEMBER

All Saints Sunday Nov 1, 2009

First Reading Isa 25:6-9
Psalm 24
Second Reading Rev 21:1-6a
Gospel John 11:32-44

23 Pentecost Nov 8, 2009

First Reading 1 Kings 17:8-16
Psalm 146
Second Reading Heb 9:24-28
Gospel Mark 12:38-44

24 Pentecost Nov 15, 2009

First Reading Dan 12:1-3
Psalm 16
Second Reading Heb 10:11-25
Gospel Mark 13:1-8

Christ the King Nov 22, 2009

First Reading Dan 7:9-10, 13-14
Psalm 93
Second Reading Rev 1:4b-8
Gospel John 18:33-37

1 Advent Nov 29, 2009

First Reading Jer 33:14-16
Psalm 25:1-10
Second Reading 1 Thess 3:9-13
Gospel Luke 21:25-36

HAPPY NOVEMBER BIRTHDAY

Brendan Carbery Nov. 1
Korina Knudson Nov. 10
Max Croonquist Nov. 14
Daniel Sullivan Nov. 16
Ed Zapel Nov. 29
David Carbery Nov. 30

(There are no November Anniversaries)

DAYS OF REMEMBRANCE

11/7 Fri John C. F. Heyer, missionary,
1873
11/11 Tues Martin, Bishop of Tours, 397
11/11 Tues Soren Kierkegaard, teacher, 1855
11/17 Mon Elizabeth of Thuringia, princess
of Hungary, 1231
11/23 Sun Clement, Bishop of Rome, c.100
11/23 Sun Miguel Agustin Pro, priest,
martyr, 1927
11/25 Tues Isaac Watts, hymnwriter, 1748

BAPTISM SCHEDULE FOR 2009

During 2009, baptism will be a special part of the worship on these dates:

Nov 1, Sunday, All Saints Sunday
December 25th, Friday, Christmas Day

VASHON THRIFTWAY 1% COMMUNITY DONATION PROGRAM

Remember to save your Vashon Thriftway receipts to be used for our missions program. Thriftway will donate 1% of the total to VLC. Remember the rules:

- Cash register receipts must be from Vashon Thriftway.
- Cash register receipts must be for purchases by **members** of Vashon Lutheran Church.
- Receipts turned in cannot be more than one year old.
- Purchasers must sign each receipt, and indicate their phone number.
- Receipts may be placed in the indicated receptacle in the Fellowship Hall.

Thanks for helping
Stewardship Chair

Articles for The Mouse, due Nov. 20th

FALL WORSHIP ASSISTANTS
October - December

Sunday	Ministry	Name	Name
1st	Asst. Minister	Patte Wagner	
	Usher	Richard Odekirk	Kathleen Odekirk
	Comm. Asst.	Jeff Larson	
	Lector	Perry Prescott	
2nd	Asst. Minister	June Langland	
	Usher	Jim Dam	Gretchen Yates
	Comm. Asst.	Janet Williams	
	Lector	Stephanie Lee	
3rd	Asst. Minister	M. Goth	
	Usher	Bonnie Snaza	Peggy Stringfellow
	Comm. Asst.	Hazel Nelson	
	Lector	Jeff Larson	
4th	Asst. Minister	Gary Peterson	
	Usher	Jack Lincoln	Susan Lincoln
	Comm. Asst.	Karen Stamper	
	Lector	Jack Lincoln	
5th	Asst. Minister	Jill Dubois-Fultz	
	Usher	Jack Lincoln	Susan Lincoln
	Comm. Asst.	Jeff Larson	
	Lector	Stephanie Lee	

REMEMBER IN YOUR PRAYERS:

Brad and Jane; Lyanne Koehler (Patte Wagner's aunt); Judy and Michele, who are friends of Gail Larson; Terri Hitch; Tim Marsh (Asst. Mgr. at Thriftway); Josephine (relative of Linda VanStone); Karen Rae; Doug Clark and his daughter (friend of J. Lincoln); Stephanie Lee & family. **Also remember those in care facilities:** Lelan Lau, Carl Nelson, & Oda Sorensen. **Contact Gail Larson** at 567-4779 to initiate a prayer request.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER GROUP meets every Thursday at 9:00 am. Please call Gail Larson (567-4779) for prayer requests.

**PLEASE SIGN-UP FOR FLOWERS FOR THE ALTAR AND
REFRESHMENTS
FOR FELLOWSHIP HOUR**