



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

First Sunday in Lent (A) – Romans 5:12-19

Focus: *From Sin to Life*

word of life

“Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.” (Romans 5:18 NRSV)

Read Romans 5:12-19

The season of Lent and this reading begins with a resounding, “Therefore...” (See Romans 5:12) The Apostle Paul appears to be making important closing remarks to an argument. He repeats the word “therefore” twice in this short passage. (See Romans 5:12 and Romans 5:18.)

1. *Do you wonder what proceeded “therefore”? (If so, read chapters 4 and 5 in Romans.)*
2. *What usually follows after someone uses the word “therefore”?*

The lectionary during Lent includes readings from the book of Romans on four out of five Sundays. Unlike other sections of the lectionary, the second lessons do not follow a sequential order. Thus, it is worth looking at this passage with a critical eye, trying to discern why it was chosen to begin the important season of Lent. In addition, why would the lectionary start in the middle of a theological argument by the Apostle Paul? Here is a recap of Paul’s argument:

- Therefore, sin came into our world through one man—Adam.
- Therefore, sin and death did not stay with the one man named Adam but spread to all his descendants.
- Therefore, all have sinned.

Paul is not defining sin as individual wrongdoings and transgressions, but rather in broader terms. Sin is the separation between humans and God. It is sin which has dominion over us. We do things we set out not to do. We do not embody love, kindness, mercy, and compassion. We who are created in the image of God do not adequately reflect the glory of God.

3. *How do you define sin?*
4. *Why discuss sin? Aren’t there more uplifting topics for us to discuss? Explain your answer.*

The Apostle Paul clearly names the power of sin in our lives, but he also shifts to the gift of grace extended by God through one man—Jesus Christ. Just as Adam died, many others have died. But here is the good news. Just as Jesus Christ died and lived again, so we are promised to live again. “But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many.” (Romans 5:15 NRSV) Sin is strong and has dominion, but Jesus is stronger and has dominion over sin. Paul concludes his argument as follows:

- Therefore, life came into the world through one man—Jesus Christ.
- Therefore, life and grace did not stay with the one man named Jesus, but spread to all who believe.
- Therefore, grace is extended to many.

Paul is writing a letter of incredible good news for anyone who has ever sinned.

5. *What do you think is the most important message in this passage?*
6. *What would you like to ask Paul about this passage?*

Word among us

The football team had never experienced such success on the field. As they made final preparations for the biggest game of their lives, their coach was concerned about the distractions. He tried to find some slogan, motto, or gadget which could keep them focused. Finally, he figured it out. He brought in blinders worn by horses during a race.

The players were puzzled and wondered what the coach had in mind. He was known for his crazy pre-game antics, but even he wouldn't attach blinders to the players. Here was his mantra, "See a lot, see nothing. See little, see a lot." The players laughed and glanced at each other. No one had a clue what he was talking about.

1. *What was the point of the coach?*
2. *What does it mean to "See a lot--see nothing! See little—see a lot!"?*

The coach knew the big stadium, crowd, and lights might be overwhelming to his team. The coach knew his young players would naturally want to look around and soak in the whole experience. They would want to "see a lot" during the game. Their tendency might be to forget the little things which brought them success. The coach explained, "Each guy on the football team needs to do his job on the football field. Nothing more. Nothing less." The coach believed if the players could focus on the little amount of turf just in front of them and not the whole stadium, they had a chance for success.

In life, we too can get overwhelmed. We see a lot! We see clutter on our desks and lengthy to-do lists. Who has time to pray with so much before us? Lent is a time to interrupt our busy lives and to prioritize. We can choose to not focus on all, but center on one—Jesus Christ.

3. *What needs to change during Lent for you not to choose to see and do everything?*
4. *What might you give up or take on during Lent?*

faith practice in daily life

Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans masterfully reduced complex theological concepts to an easy formula. His conclusion is simple. Therefore, sin came into the world through Adam and continues today. But God sent one man Jesus Christ to extend the gift of grace and life itself. It is a simple analogy, but has the power to be transformative. Paul writes of only two men—Adam and Jesus. But in doing so, Paul shares an expansive view of God's grace.

5. *How helpful is it to focus only on two men—Adam and Jesus? Explain your answer.*
6. *How would you describe the good news about Jesus?*

The Apostle Paul was among those first Christian preachers and teachers who had the unique opportunity to articulate the meaning and importance of Jesus Christ. He creatively combined familiar passages of scripture and contemporary new images. He fervently wanted to teach the faith.

7. *Imagine you have been given a chance to teach about Jesus Christ. Complete this sentence as you teach, "Therefore...."*

Prayer

Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Hear our prayer. Amen

last word

Be intentional about setting aside Lent to focus on Christ.