

A text about SIN – perhaps THE text about SIN; and on the Sunday that the PCC stands ready to convene a General Assembly... And the Sunday following a week of discussion, heartbreak and political head scratching around our relationships with Indigenous, First Nations, Innu and Metis people in this country. I'll leave you to consider how (or if) the Spirit is at work in the setting of the Lectionary texts.

A text about SIN – and where does that get us? Nowhere! Even in this text – set at the beginning of our Scriptures to suggest the rocky start to our relationship with the Divine – even here in Genesis 3 it's a blame game, and in the end, there are NO WINNERS.

- God drives the created companions of God out of the Divine presence.
- The serpent – though crafty – is reduced to slithering.
- The humans are forced to face reality for the first time.

None of it is pretty, and all because of...What? Temptation? Pride? Arrogance? Ego? Yes, all of these and more, which are just manifestations of what the church calls SIN.

Now, the church has drawn some very specific conclusions about SIN out of this Genesis text. First – that our choices are what keep us from living gloriously at ease in some mystical paradise. Second – that there is a very specific way to blame our 'primordial parents' for our current circumstances. Third – "the Serpent made us do it."

Think what you will about these conclusions, Western society built itself on a model of SIN and grace that still affects the way we relate to one another...and it's not all good.

Here are some observations of mine – though I can hardly claim them as original - following a week of rumination (rather than twenty centuries of bitter back and forth...)

SIN is not the same as sins. SIN seems to be an integral part of our humanness, which means to be fully human followers of Jesus, we don't become SIN-less, so much as we become aware of our SIN – able to name and claim it (like in a good twelve-step program) – which means there are no 'former Sinners', just Sinners who have been awakened (redeemed) by the work of God in Jesus.

The difference between SIN and sins matters...a lot! One is a human condition (singular and, in this text, capitalized) the others are an diverse and fairly fluid group of infractions that are variously designated as a little bit naughty (at the mild end of the spectrum) or (in the extreme case) evil.

The lesson about SIN in Genesis 3 is that it is pervasive, and will raise it's ugly head even in the midst of beautiful moments – even when (especially when?) we least expect it. Everyone is prone to SIN; no one is immune (well, okay – Jesus, but no one else.) and our reaction to getting caught wearing our SIN in public is the kind of blame-shifting that happens between/among the man, the woman, and the serpent. Conclusion: there is nothing new under the sun where human misbehaviour is concerned. Just as surely as bad things happen to good people, good people are capable of bad things.

And so, we arrive at the news of the day. Not just the last 10 days, but on any given day we will be presented with the wide variety of evidence that SIN is real and we are all caught in its net. But SIN revealed is not the same as SIN acknowledged or SIN confronted or SIN confessed. Pointing fingers and demanding action in the form of revenge is satisfying but it is not what is required. We are invited by grace – we are invited by Jesus – to acknowledge SIN and name it. And if we dare to accept that invitation, as followers of Jesus we are required to apologize and MEAN IT. We are required to listen to the stories of those who have been harmed and take them seriously. We are required to make room for their grief, and not disguise it with our shame.

Reparations (or prosecutions) may be all well and good, but what our SIN demands is reconciliation; a constantly changing act of seeking to recognize and honour the humanity of those whom we have damaged by our callous mistreatment and constant dismissal.

Our denominational apology is nearly 30 years old. It was a good place to start, but words are easily forgotten. Our words from 1994 put the denomination on the path to reconciliation that we're still travelling. We are learning lessons every step of the way, and occasionally we fall off the path. That's how humans are – that's what being human is. And part of being faithful humans means we keep digging into Scripture, to see what it has to say to us about our current reality – our most recent, painful discovery of human SIN.

The lesson of Genesis chapter three – once the dust has settled well along in the chapter (v. 20-21) – is that SIN is **both caused by and is the reason for our broken relationships.** God speaks; humans hide. Excuses are made and offered. Truth is hidden or denied.

And most important in all of this is that God tries to keep the lines of communication open. The unhappy couple may be banished, but they are not abandoned (God clothes them as they are shown the door – surely a sign of hope.) The gift that Jesus gives us is not instant absolution. When Jesus says – to the lame, the broken, the outcast and the fallen – ‘your sins are forgiven,’ he offers them (and us) the means to heal relationships. First, we can acknowledge ourselves as fully human, flaws and all. Then we are given the chance – through Jesus – to reconnect with the reality that we thought had abandoned every broken thing.

Reality is full of broken things being drawn back into some kind of useful shape. Survivors of horrors we can't imagine are able, once their brokenness is recognized and described, to offer incredible gifts to the rest of us. Their trauma is indisputably part of who they are. The complex soup of human nature is not just ‘good or bad,’ and that is the lesson I find waiting in Genesis 3.

We are not perfect – we were not built for perfection - but even deeply flawed we are dearly loved, and that's the safest place for me to stand these days.

The Good News? Deep love of the deeply flawed has been God's position all along.