

Rev. Randall Hubbard
Ezekiel 33:7-9
Romans 13:8-10
Matthew 18:15-20

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
September 3-4, 2011

Question, and I'm going to ask you to be bold and courageous. Who here is a sinner? (laughter) If you did not raise your hand, I would implore you to speak to your family and friends because they will help you name your sins.

We've established in our gathering, by the show of our hands, that we are sinners. That we come here sinners. It's easy for us. We can acknowledge our own sins. And when we need to, we will. But we really, really, really do not like for others to point out our sins. We really don't like for anyone else to bring to light our shortcomings, our failures, our weaknesses, our sins. We don't like for anyone else to point that finger, if you will.

And the thing about sin is, sin is one of those things that all too often we really can, in so many ways, sort of rationalize it away and call it anything but sin. But the truth of the matter is that sin exists, that we do sin. And the good news of this weekend that our scriptures remind us of is that we have a responsibility to acknowledge sin so that we might be open to receiving God's mercy and God's forgiveness. But even beyond that, while we are aware on a private, personal kind of way that yes, we sin, and that we have sinned and oftentimes we would say be offensive to God, sin also not only affects this relationship of ourselves with God, but it also affects this relationship of ourselves with one another.

Every sin, there's not a one, every sin impacts both! Each of us with God, and each of us with one another. Sin has that affect in a negative, destructive kind of way.

And what we're told then in our scriptures, especially mindful in our first reading from the prophet Ezekiel...the prophet Ezekiel here is being commissioned a second time to be the prophet of God to God's people. God's people have sinned; and because of their sin, Jerusalem is about to be destroyed by the Babylonians. Even though the prophet had warned them and warned them and warned them, it is coming to fruition. Jerusalem is about to be leveled by the Babylonians. And so in Ezekiel's being recommissioned, the recommissioning is to be a sentinel. Be there as

my mouthpiece. God saying to his people, tell them that I continue to love them and forgive them. That in spite of their sin, my mercy and my forgiveness, flows to them.

But it's also a matter of recognizing accountability for sin. It's because of their sin this comes to be. But it doesn't negate God's love or God's mercy. And so we have then a responsibility, if you will, not only to ourselves, but to each other to name sin when we see sin. When sin happens, it's important for us to be willing to point it out. We don't bring it to light – the sin of another – simply to point a finger or to judge or condemn. As we're reminded in our second reading from Paul's letter to the Romans, it is an act of love, and act of love, that we want to bring to light the sin so that we might be in right relationship with God, and those others too might be in right relationship with God! For it's only in acknowledging and naming sin that we can be forgiven the sin. That we can be restored to our relationship with God. That we can be restored with our relationship to the community.

And so sin is present. And as Jesus points out in our gospel again, there is that communal aspect that when one offends, we go and we state the offense. If there is no contrition, no reconciliation, then you bring others, and it comes before the community so that the want is that everyone be reconciled.

And so that is what our scriptures remind us of is this great love of God that gives us the courage to acknowledge sin, knowing that God forgives us, knowing that God forgives others, but also helping others that are struggling with the naming of that sin to name it, so that they can be restored to that right relationship with God, knowing God's love and God's mercy.

So we do that again, as we're reminded in our scripture, because of our love for one another. Our want for each and everyone to have that relationship with God that is good and that is holy, that is life-giving and encouraging.

We pray then that we have that courage and strength to name sin. To be willing to help others to name it so that we all might be in that relationship with our God that assures us that our God loves us, that our God forgives us, that our God wants us to share in God's own life. And that happens through our willingness to love – to love God, to love one another, and to allow love...the light of love...to dispel the darkness of sin; to allow us to be reconciled and made whole through God's love through our willingness to name it so that we can be forgiven. And that comes to us through God and God's love for us.

