

10 March 2021
Lent 3 Midweek

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Facets of Forgiveness: *Fixed*”

Text: Genesis 44:1-34; Colossians 2:13-14; John 19:16b-22

Psalm 22:1-11

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

It's good to know where things are. A place for everything and everything in its place, as the saying goes. The car keys hung by the front door. Your phone plugged in to recharge in the same place each night. The peanut butter always in the same place in the shelf. These are things you count on. There's order. A certain calmness that comes with the routine. But move those things . . . If you can't find the car keys . . . You don't know where your phone is . . . You have the bread and the jelly out, but where is the peanut butter?? Then there is uncertainty, worry, fear, aggravation, even panic, depending on what is out of its place. And the longer it goes, the worse it gets.

So it is with your sin. You may not have ever thought about it like that before, but the beautiful facet of forgiveness we'll consider tonight is that our sins are *fixed*. And when they are fixed, when they are in one certain place that we know, we're okay. But when they're not . . . that's when we have worries, uncertainty, fear, and even panic.

In the Scriptures, the disease of leprosy is often a picture of sin for us. A disease that leads to death. We don't have much leprosy around anymore, so maybe a better picture for us would be cancer. If you have cancer, that's never good news, but there's an important distinction to be made. If your cancer is localized, all in one place, fixed, and it hasn't spread all through your body, then radiation and surgery can probably deal with it, kill it, and get it out of your body. But once that cancer has metastasized, once it has spread throughout your body, the prognosis is not so good. With cancer, as with our sin, *fixed* is good.

Sadly, though, that's not the case with us. Sin has infected our whole body, and not just our bodies, but our minds and our hearts, our desires, too. You can't point to one place in your body and say there is my sin. It *has* metastasized. Jesus once said that if your foot or hand causes you to sin, or if your eye causes you to sin, cut them off, gouge them out, and throw them away (Matthew 18:8-9). Surgery, to get rid of the diseased parts. Except that doesn't work, if *all of you* is diseased.

But actually, it's worse than that. For Saint Paul tells us that while sin came into the world through one man, it didn't stay fixed in that one man, but metastasized through the

whole world! Sin and death spread to all men (Romans 5). Which sounds very out-of-control. And it is. We try to tame our sin, tamp it out, keep it under control, but it is not so easily dealt with. No matter how hard we try, it keeps popping up in the worst places and at the worst times.

And this sin . . . it doesn't *lead* to death. It has, in fact, already killed you. As we heard Paul say in the reading from Colossians tonight, ***you were dead in your trespasses***. Pull the sheet over your head. Call the undertaker. It is finished.

Except it's not. For, to finish Paul's sentence in Colossians, ***you who were dead in your trespasses . . . God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.***

With those words, Paul has introduced another way, another picture, of how we might look at our sins - not like leprosy or cancer, like a disease, but as a debt. And there's a record of that debt. Written down. An accounting. A ledger book. And it has legal demands for payment.

But what did God do with that record? Paul says ***he nailed it to the cross***. Isn't that an interesting picture? That's not how we usually think. The big, fat ledger book of our debt, of our sins, nailed to the cross. That's worthy of some consideration . . .

So imagine if it wasn't. If the ledger book of all your sins was open and available for all to see. Or, to maybe make it a bit more contemporary to our day and age . . . imagine all the papers you put in your recycling bin blowing down the street. You didn't bother to shred them . . . and so imagine . . . account numbers, your social security number, your passwords, all your private information, blowing down the street for identity thieves to scoop up and use against you. Pretty frightening. As long as all those papers were *fixed*, in the recycling bin, it was okay. But they're not. They're loose.

But with Paul's picture, God has taken all that and *fixed* it again. Not stuffing the record of our sins back into us, into the trash bins of our souls, but nailing them to the cross. And it's actually even better than that, for God has done that with the sins, the ledgers, the debts, of the whole world. So when you look at the cross . . . *is that your page or mine?* You don't know. They're all there. All one giant pile of sins nailed to the cross. But maybe you can still read some of those pages . . . if you look hard enough? If you squint real hard? Nope. You can't even do that. For they're covered in blood. Blood you can't see through. Blood that has smeared out all the writing. Blood that has taken away all your sins. Your sins so wild, so uncontrollable, so unfixed, now *fixed* again. Nailed with Jesus to the cross.

The cross, which, actually, HAS one thing nailed to it that CAN be read. The *titulus*, or

the charges, written by Pontius Pilate and affixed over Jesus' head: ***Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews***. So all those sins nailed to the cross with Him? All those ledgers, debts, demands . . . they must belong to Him. Yes, yes they do. He made them His, to set us free. Free from the uncertainty, worry, fear, and panic that your sins are going to come back and threaten you again, and identify you as the sinner. Nope. They're *fixed*. On the cross. On Christ.

And it's good to know where things are, and to know that our sin, fixed to the cross, is not going to blow back into our lives. That's what happen in Egypt, with Joseph's brothers, that story we heard part of tonight. If you remember the story, Joseph's brother's were jealous of the fact that he was their father's favorite, so they sold him into slavery and he was taken to Egypt. But God did not forget him. So after many years of trials and troubles, Joseph rose up to second in command of all Egypt. And now a famine had come, and Joseph's brothers have to go to Egypt to buy food. And what happens? Their sin comes back to haunt them! Up till now, the brothers had been able to keep their papers, their sins, secret and hidden and out of the wind. But now, with the trial that has come upon them, Judah says, ***God has found out the guilt of your servants!*** Their consciences are pricked and the flood gates have opened. They see and feel all their past sin blowing down dusty Egyptian streets. And they are worried, panicking, and filled with fear.

Joseph is going to keep the one brother there, Benjamin, who was guilty of the theft. But Judah steps up to be his substitute. Keep me instead, he says. But it was not to be. For in the next verses, Joseph reveals himself to his brothers and forgives them. No, Judah would not be the substitute for the sin of Benjamin . . . but one from Judah would be. For Judah was the tribe from which Jesus would come. And He is the one held for the sin of all, the substitute for us all, crucified for the sin of us all. So we don't have to fear our sin blowing back, our sin which has metastasized, our sin so deadly. ***God made us alive together with Jesus, having forgiven all our trespasses***, all our debts. They're *fixed* on Him.

What another wonderful facet of forgiveness. We are not only *cleansed*, we are not only *covered*, but our sins are *fixed* on Christ. And it's good to know where things are. And it's *especially* good to know where your sins are, and that they're not on you. You are free.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.