

“God’s Law is Spiritual and it’s too Hard!”
3 Lent B

In last week’s Adult disciples class, we heard the Prayer Book’s definition of sin, “Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation.”

God’s will versus man’s will: why does it have to be so hard? Today’s scripture explains why it is so hard to be good. We are told what God wants from us. We have the knowledge of what is right in the Decalogue and elsewhere in scripture. We are told that loving God and our neighbor above all else is the path for God’s people to take. We know what is good. But it is like that nagging test question that comes up again and again and we have the wrong response every time! We miss the mark. Is it a mental block? Is it sabotage? Is it plain stupidity? All three?

Just like the dog who is full yet can’t resist sight and smell of its owners eating food there is something like that reaction in each of us to want more of what is not good for us. Though dog is man’s best friend, a dog is the best reminder to us that we humans can be our own worst enemy.

There is a basic law operating within people that leads to do just the opposite of what is good. God’s law simply reminds us of that reality. That we are sinners is as plain a truth as one could understand yet life runs us into people who live as if they are a law unto themselves.

The power of sin is clever; it is intellectual as well as overtly dumb and dumber. I can’t think of a better illustration of this than the 1994 film by that name with actors Jim Carrey and Jeff Daniels. Mindless behavior for a mindless society...and it does make us laugh at how foolish people can be. A favorite film character, Forrest Gump said it best, “Stupid is as stupid was.”

Thousands of years, one great civilization after another with moral codes and moral laws compounded, have not brought us any closer to controlling the Law of Sin operating within us. The age of Enlightenment, the age of Reason, the possibilities of creating Utopias on earth offered no solution to eliminate racism, egotism and all negativisms.

St. Paul concludes his discourse on sin in Romans: “I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me

captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" He thanks God that Jesus Christ our Lord will do just that.

Jesus Christ renders powerless the law of sin so we can live powerfully free to choose what is right. Eye correction helps us to see clearly. The right lens takes the distortion and blurriness from our vision. Jesus gives us the lens correction so we can see clearly what is true and lovely and right and live the relationship with God that he lived on earth. We can get close to that life. The human will can be transformed into what the divine will intends for us.

The bottom line: we cannot stop trying. We do not get any more grace points for less progress toward holiness with thoughts that it is human to err and divine to forgive. Cheap grace says to the one who hung on the cross, "Jesus, thanks for dying, but I was too busy to pray, I never had enough to help the needy, I guess I was afraid to tell my own family I loved them, I should have taken a stand against that policy, but I know you still love me and forgive me." "Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see."

Those were the words of a slave trader – a man who dealt in power and control and ownership of another man's life. Radically transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, John Newton became a powerhouse of liberty to all slaves of sin.