

Date Preached	03-Apr-2022	Date Initiated	22-Mar-2022
Where Preached	SAK	Appointed Readings	Lent 5, Yr C

" Yet whatever gains I had,  
these I have come to regard as loss ↓ because of Christ. "



Today, we conclude our Lenten reflection on our sinful selfwardness—on how bound up we are in our own SELVES: our own interests, our own comforts, our own reckonings of the world; and also on Lent's leading us to repentance—to the tempering or modulation of SELF, ↓ to allow the Holy Spirit to take us in a more deeply spiritual and more Godward direction. Over the last several weeks, we've explored, in the parlance of the General Confession, the sins that we *do*, in THOUGHT, WORD and DEED. We turn now—and only briefly—to the so-called "sins of omission": the things we have LEFT UNDONE ... the imperatives of Christ ↓ that remain subjunctives\* for us, if we even pause to consider them at all.

In this series, we've consciously not addressed discrete or episodic sins—the random thoughtless word or the one-time (or, even, once-in-a-while) angry or greedy act. Instead, we've heeded Lent's wider call for us to turn away from the more systemic, more pervasive ... the more SELF-defining ... sins in our lives: ¶the curtailing assumptions we routinely, and often unknowingly, make; ¶the cool silence we customarily accord Jesus with our lips, in our daily conversations; ¶the blind-eye we instinctually turn to fresh ways of doing or being, to preserve our comfortable *status quo*. These are shortcuts ... conveniences of thought and of conscience ... we habitually take, to avoid fuller, more open, more *vulnerable* engagement with the world—and with God. These SELF-imposed limitations on what we DO are tantamount to our driving the firetruck to the fire at only thirty miles an hour, rather than the fifty or sixty that would get us there in time to do any real good.

But in order to confront the sinfulness of what we've LEFT UNDONE, we need to pause to ask why *we're* in the driver's seat in the first place. Why aren't we riding in the back with rest of the crew ... or back at the fire house helping the janitor? Or, God forbid, shivering on the front lawn, helplessly watching flames consume everything we own ... and praying the truck will get here before it's too late. For perhaps the single greatest sin of NOT-DOING is habituation—blindness; inurement—to all the stuff and status and advantage—so seamlessly woven into our lives—that turn us away from the God Who resides in those who are *different* ... keep us from seeing the finger of Jesus pointing, emphatically, to *those in need*:

- This is our familiarity with an Episcopal 'way' of faith and worship which, on the one hand, fosters belonging and community; but, on the other, can't fathom the deep spirituality in Roman Catholic or Orthodox liturgy that we judge 'too high' ... or in the Pentecostal tradition we dismiss as too emotional.'

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\* In fact, I'd say "optatives" if English had such a mood.

- This is our tendency to regard as earned—as our *individual* accomplishment—the successes we've had and the privileges we enjoy ... without considering all the infrastructure—both material *and* social—that scaffolds this nation, without the benefit of which our lives' journeys would have been far more difficult and, quite possibly, far less fruitful.
- This is our ability to observe, both here and around the world, \_ mind-boggling, heart-wrenching disparities in terms of access to healthcare and adequate nutrition ... of levels of education, compensation and unemployment ... of the prevalence and severity of crime and punishment ... of the distribution of wealth and the abjection of poverty ... of the maintenance of peace and the perpetuation of violence and oppression ... of the upholding of common human dignity and the casual trampling of human souls into dust ... .. and content ourselves by blaming it all on happenstance: on the accident of where or when or how someone was born or raised. Thus leaving UN-DONE ↓ the discomfiting, SELF-searching work of pondering whether there may be someone—or someones—sitting at the levers of earthly power, shunting more of the 'goods' of this world in one direction and more of the 'bads' in another.

We *all* suffer from an unconscious—but no less culpable for being so!—bias to regard our own lifestyle and values as 'normal' or 'salutary' or even 'preferred,' rather than acknowledging that what each of us calls **I** is only one of a myriad of outcomes ... each driven, in turn, by an infinity of causes, seen and unseen ... of human existence: There but for the grace of God go ... .

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This myopia-of-SELF is precisely the sin St Paul calls the Philippians to repent of in today's Epistle lesson. Late in life—but not *too* late, he tells them, he came to realize the self-regard, self-worth and self-satisfaction that dominated his worldview: as to religion, *cradle*; as to lineage, *venerable*; as to ethnicity, *pure*; as to status, *high*; as to theology, *unimpeachable*; as to faith, *unwavering*. Fortunate to be born into the accumulated gain of the generations who came before me, Paul says, I piled up still *more* badges, honors and achievements throughout my life.

But, he continues, I had it *all wrong*. All of this supposed gain ... all of this rectitude and status and zeal ... was not gain, but loss; not treasure, but trash.<sup>†</sup> The only gain of any worth is Christ; the *only* treasure in this world is faith: knowing Him, contrary to all the ways and the whys of this world, to be our Lord and Savior; knowing that whatever righteousness we have, we've obtained only by *dying* to our *selves* and rising, again, to new life, in Him.

And, Paul continues, this cycle of dying and rising in Christ ... birthed in the Font and nourished at the Table and in the other sacraments ... never ends. It is Jesus' clear, constant and continual invitation for us to forget all that lies behind us in our lives—all that we hold so precious and count so dear—and press forward, toward Him: toward *His* love, toward *His* mercy; toward *His* way of seeing the world. It is to notice, at last, all the UNDONEs in our life—all those people and conflicts and sufferings we've preferred not to look at ... or, worse, to casually excuse or lightly explain away—and *be* Christ: in and to and for them. For this is full repentance: our turning not just

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<sup>†</sup> The Greek word Paul uses here (σκύβαλον), in fact, means "dung."

our hearts ... but our whole lives ... to Jesus, and sacrificing our very *selves*, to be fountains of His SELF-less grace ... in a world parched by, and drowning in, the sin of SELF.



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