

Romans 5:12-19 & Genesis 2

what's wrong?

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Roy W. Howard

It's not uncommon for people to tell me what's breaking their heart. Every occasion is holy, and I believe God is present in each one. But in one particular conversation, it was as if she were speaking for all of us. The woman, in great despair, came to me with the anguished question – Why are humans doing such horrible things? You could see the pain in her eyes. She was in tears, as she began to recite the things breaking her heart beginning with the beheading of a German sailor by ISIS in the Philippines, then the racist driven killing of an Indian man in Kansas, the bombing of Jewish centers and desecration of their cemeteries, the talk of rounding up undocumented immigrants and sending them away from their children, chemical warfare on civilians in Syria. On and on she went, painfully surveying the world. I listened until she stopped and asked earnestly: *what is going on with us?* By "us" she meant the whole of humanity, not some isolated individuals. As I said, I think she was asking for all of us.

There was silence. Then I gave her my best short answer = **Sin.**

By that short answer I wasn't being flippant. I meant it seriously. That is the answer of scripture, beginning with Genesis and echoed by Saint Paul in this morning's reading.

It's not particularly popular to speak about sin. It hasn't been for a long time. I assume it but rarely talk about, in part because I have a sense that it's lost all meaning. You understand, right, that I'm not talking about the variety of sins you might name – from lying to adultery to murder? Those are symptoms of this falling away from the path that God has set before us.

The falling away from God is the message of the primal story in Genesis. It's not necessary to believe in a literal Adam and Eve to understand that the proclivity to choose the wrong course of action is strangely nestled within humanity. **The origins of human sin are mysterious. What cannot be disputed is the empirical evidence of it.** That was the woman's painful litany. I don't pretend to have the final word, but Genesis tells us there was a time when Adam and Eve – primordial humanity – lived harmoniously with God and creation. Yet, Adam *made a choice* to break that relationship with an act of deception. Some philosophers have called it the first act of human liberation. I respect that opinion, but frankly I don't see walking away from God as human liberation. From that choice there has not been a time when humanity has not been plagued with the effects of such a disastrous decision. Sin and death have continued ever since.

Sin, as Paul perceives it through Genesis, is like the relentless march of the Nazis across Europe as they conquered one country after another. Evil itself dominates and its companion is death. **This is the nature of evil and sin in all its forms: to dominate, enslave and ultimately kill all in its power.** This is the contagion whose symptoms the woman was lamenting. Sin is the

synonym for all that drives humanity to self-destruction and misery. Again, it's so hard to talk about this because most of us have learned to think of sin as the individual acts of moral failure – including trivial ones - rather than the profound invisible web in which humanity is caught.

What's the remedy? Saint Paul sums it up with one man Adam contrasted with the one man Jesus Christ. Adam. As I mentioned it is not necessary to believe in a literal Adam to understand that that proclivity to choose the wrong course of action is nestled within humanity. But Paul is equally adamant that there is one who can and does attack the root cause of all that wreaks havoc upon the human race. That one man is Jesus Christ. This the truth that sets people free from despair and free from resorting to all the solutions that result in the endless cycles of conflict, death and destruction. Through Jesus Christ, God has attacked the root cause of humanity's relentless terrible love affair with death.

God, in relentless love for humanity, sent Jesus Christ to be for us the medicine for the deadly wound that has inflicted humanity. This is the remedy to the contagion that continues to drive our destruction. The healing of the heart does not occur over night. But it does occur over a lifetime as you choose to live in Christ. One can say the same of the human condition that God is relentlessly seeking to heal with the medicine of the cross. Saint Paul is striving mightily for his listeners to hear this one thing – **there is a choice to be made**. Destruction has come through Adam, yet life has come in Jesus Christ. **Choose life!**

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

Amen.