

We might still have 10 days to go, but our collect today is definitely feeling the Lent vibe. Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins...

The Anglican understanding of sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, and this distorts our relationship with God, and with other people, and with all creation.

This is a very different understanding of sin to the one I was raised amidst – the theology of my early childhood had us all, even my own very young self, called out as inherently sinful, not through any real fault of my own, but only for having been born. What my young self understood about all this was that humans were so inherently bad that God was forced to give up his own and only son to take the punishment that we rightly deserve.

I didn't much like this idea, and as I got a bit older, I set out to find one I liked better.

By the time I was a teenager, I'd settled on rejecting God altogether. Using what I considered to be very sensible, rational thinking, I wholeheartedly believed that because there was no actual evidence that I could discern, no evidence I could see around me in my life for the existence of God, God was surely nothing more than an out-dated idea clung to by folks who were perhaps just too superstitious to let it go. I hadn't met anyone along the way whose life seemed to disprove this, so this idea suited me just fine. And if there was no God, there could be no sin, so I couldn't be sinful – this was a much better idea.

For the longest time, I was so locked in on this idea, given it was rational and sensible, I was ready to argue the case against God and against religion with anyone, especially with folks who believed. Based on my reasoning, I was ready to insist that the actual lived experience of faith of another person was actually wrong, that they were wrong. I was prepared to argue that what they believed, their own experience of their own life, was wrong.

It's astonishing, really, the arrogance of that is mind-blowing.

For much of my life I lived mostly in my head, my ideas were essentially my identity, they were who I was. My opinions and my beliefs drove the way I engaged with the world. My experience of the world, my embodied encounter with the world and the people in it, was something I just had to tolerate; life in the world was hard and people were, by and large, challenging. Being opinionated was a form of defense against a world that was tough to navigate and felt largely hostile. Judging it was a way to feel I had some power and control.

And I seemed to be surrounded by folks living and thinking just like me.

We all thought we were right about a lot of things, but it didn't seem as though anyone felt any great joy or sense of relief or comfort in that.

And I definitely didn't feel free. If anything, I felt kinda trapped in a kinda flat existence and there was no obvious way for it to be any different.

So it's no exaggeration to say that Troy saved my life. (For those of you who don't know Troy, he's my spouse.)

When I met Troy, I was offered an entirely different way to encounter life, solely by who he was. Troy radiated life and possibility, that's the best way I can explain it, and it was really compelling. He didn't dazzle me with the depth of his understanding about life, his articulations about life, the universe, and everything, he didn't have counter-arguments for all the ideas I'd built my life on, it wasn't anything specific he said, or specific ideas he shared, it was the human he is – it was being who he is that, simply and miraculously, opened a way for me to consider life in a completely different way, that led me into actual life.

I'd built the life I was living on the belief that the world needed right ideas, and it needed more people with well-articulated right ideas who could defend them and spread them, and then the world would be a better place. I'd built my life on the belief that the world is in the state it's in because of bad ideas and so the solution was better ideas.

What I'd never really considered, or taken seriously, was the *experience* of being human, that lived experience, the quality of that, is unbelievably central to the world we co-create. And, what I'd never considered, is that it's in the fullness of lived experience that the truth of God is to be found – not in an idea.

Without realizing it, I'd built my whole life on my own ideas, the stuff of my own mind, and so I lived according to my own will. I'd denied my own experience of life, and so it was really easy not to take into account the lived experience of others. And this made for a pretty grim way of being.

.. and in line with the classic understanding of sin in the Anglican tradition, this had absolutely distorted my relationship with God, with others, and with all Creation, and it was a miserable way to be.

I had no “idea” of God ... and I was separated from that joy.

It was only, then, through my own lived *experience*, that I finally came to understand sin, not as something to be punished, but as a kind of punishment in itself, because it prevents the experience of the fullness of life; and that, truly, is punishment enough. Fullness of life can only ever be lived experience – it’s not an opinion or a well-articulated idea.

Last week, in our Gospel reading, Jesus laid out for his disciples the way of living and being that would enable them to flourish, living rightly, blessed of God. This week we hear Jesus tell his disciples, you are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. Jesus is telling his disciples that by the way they live they can reveal the truth of the fullness of life for others, they can be how others find their way into life.

And in today’s epistle, Paul says to the church in Corinth, he didn’t come proclaiming the mystery of God in lofty words or wisdom, his speech and proclamation weren’t with plausible words of wisdom – instead he comes with a demonstration of the Spirit ... so faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.

Lent isn’t a season for feeling wretched and unworthy, overwhelmed by our many shortcomings, I truly believe it’s a season for finding new ways into fullness of life, especially through the restoration of our relationships with God and with one another, and through any number of new relationships that can bring us into life in new and unexpected ways. It’s a season not about punishment, but about liberation, it’s about connecting with the full experience of being human, and being

courageous enough to recognize the habits of thought that might have us trapped and cut off from the glory of God in the world, recognize them and let go, because we are not our ideas.

The knowledge of God in Christ is a full-bodied *experience*, to be encountered, to be delighted in and to be savored, it's a knowledge that infuses our whole lived experience, it's so much more than an idea. The power and presence and God is always all around us, made real in the folks we share this life with and in the Creation we are a part of – but sometimes it can be really hard to spot.

So I'm not so sure the world needs better ideas, new ideas, more opinions ... I'm pretty sure it needs salt and light, salt and light so the world might "taste and see" as the Psalmist says, "taste and see that God is good."¹

¹ Psalm 34:8