

Sermon 19c 2019: A Community for All the World, Sinners that We Are

Introduction: The One Attribute for Being Part of the Community

Our theme for this year at St. David's is *A Community for the World*;

It's an important aspect of the Christian life that we hope will help us all
Come to a deeper knowledge of and personal relationship with God
And shape us into a community that reflects the love of God;
All the while teaching us to welcome others
Into the love and life and community that we are coming to know.

Now, some of the sermons will focus on who God is and how we are being invited

To enter into a deeper, daily life with God;
Other sermons may have a greater emphasis on who we are as a community;
Some sermons will focus on our call to engage the world with our values;
And some, of course, may not be connected in any way to our theme
Because if you want to hear God laugh just tell Him about a plan like this one.

Well, today's focus in our year of *A Community for the World* is on who is invited to join in
And on the quality of the community that God wants us to create and live into.

We live in a society, in a culture, where it's pretty clear what gifts or characteristics are required
For us to pursue a certain way of life or to belong to a certain group of people;
And our abilities and our qualifications and our age matter all the time.

My limited window of opportunity to play professional football closed in 10th grade
When I stopped growing taller and realized that I better get a lot faster
Or come up with another plan for my life and here I am.

Sports stars have certain, unusual abilities and with hard work and some luck can make it,
But only for a time, until age and the younger and swifter catch up with them, too.

Business people have to have a way with vision, with people, with using finances
Scientists have to have gifts for science, math, and a love for research;
Musicians have to have an ear and teachers, gifts for communication and patience;
And when we find our gifts and how they can best be used, we can join in, too.

And Jesus has criteria for who He calls and who will answer His call, as well;
Only persons with a certain quality of the heart are able to join God's community;
Oh, Jesus invites everyone, but everyone who actually followed Jesus
In His earthly ministry; everyone who followed in the Gospels;
And everyone who has followed through time, including some of us;
Have this one quality that made them and make us prime prospects
To hear His call and join in God's community.

In fact, if you don't have this one quality,
His call will fall on deaf ears; His invitation won't make any sense to you and your life;
And the one quality required for His call to have meaning, for us to join in
Is that we know we are sinners.

Everyone Jesus calls and seeks to find; everyone who answers Jesus' call is not only a sinner,
But someone who knows they are, which makes Jesus' invitation all the sweeter.

Sinners versus Mistakers

Ahhh, there's that word, sinner, sin, sinful; I probably lost some of you there;
It's such a pesky, charged word – sin;

We don't use it much anymore and almost never outside of church.

Sin makes us think of judgment; of moral absolutes; of being accountable for our lives;
Of guilt, of facing either punishment or having to seek actual forgiveness.

One dictionary gives these definitions for sin, "Sin is a transgression of divine law",
And "Sin is any act regarded as a willful or deliberate violation
Of some religious or moral principle."

Sin means I did it on purpose; it was willful;

Sin means I knew it was wrong when I did it and I did it anyway;

And because sin doesn't make me feel very good about myself, we don't use that word.

We like this word, "I didn't sin. I just made a mistake."

"A mistake is an error in action, calculation or judgment caused by poor reasoning"

Oh, I just wasn't thinking straight or I didn't see that;

Or, I didn't know any better.

This is a much better word because when you catch me in a mistake,

I can say, "Oh, my bad, my mistake, sorry";

And the assumption is that you can't be too mad at me because it was a mistake

I just didn't know any better and now I know.

There's a big difference between a sin and a mistake;

With a mistake, I don't have to ask you to forgive me;

I can just say I'm sorry and hope that we can move along;

But sin is a different thing altogether and here's the twist.

If everything we do wrong can be dumbed down to where it's just a mistake,

That makes me a *mistaker*, (not in the dictionary) which means I don't sin;

And if I don't sin, I'm not a sinner;

And if I'm not a sinner,

Then I have no need for a Savior or for God's community.

If you and I are mistakers, then all we have to do is to try and do better;

Mistakers just have to break that nasty habit;

Mistakers just have to be more consistent or try harder next time.

But if I'm a sinner that seems to be more fundamental to who I am, to my character;

If I'm a sinner, then trying harder isn't going to get it done,
Because I probably owe something to somebody; I probably have guilt;
I probably deserve something I don't really want to know that much about;
If I'm a sinner, trying harder isn't going to help me.

Jesus and the Gospel

And if that isn't enough, Jesus comes along and raises the issue to an even higher level.

In His earthly ministry, Jesus taught these two opposing ideas

First, He came along and made everybody feel even worse about themselves

By raising the bar on what sin is;

In Matthew's Gospel He says, "You've heard it said that murder is a sin,

But I tell you that if you're angry with your brother or sister,

Then you've committed a sin."

It's not just our actions that are sinful, it's our thoughts

And we don't have any control over that;

So nobody is righteous, nobody is without sin, nobody meets God's standards.

And then Jesus, at the same time says "Oh yeah, by the way, God loves you.

God loves you. He loves you just the way you are."

And the people had to be going, wait a minute, either I'm terrible or God loves me.

And Jesus says, "It's both – you're terrible and God loves you;

You're worse than you thought and God loves you more than you can imagine.

He loves you so much that He sent me to find you and bring you back to Him."

This was so strange to people and especially strange and challenging to the mistakers -

Strange to the scribes, the Pharisees, the religious leaders who question Jesus

About welcoming sinners and eating with them in this morning's Gospel;

These mistakers didn't like Jesus because He made them feel bad.

They felt bad because they were trying as hard as they could to follow the law
But Jesus insisted that outside of perfect lawfulness, it wasn't good enough;
And in fact they were sinners after all, just like the people they condemned.

But the others, the people who knew in their hearts that they were sinners, loved Jesus;
They flocked to Jesus, they couldn't get enough of Jesus,
Like the tax collectors and sinners coming near to Jesus in today's Gospel;
They were honest enough to look in the mirror
Or had heard enough from their religious leaders to know they were sinners
And they were able to say, He's right. It's worse than even I thought;
And if there's any hope for me, it's not because I'm going to do better or try harder;
It's because I need a Savior and God has sent us Jesus to find me and to bring me home.

You see, only sinners are candidates to hear Jesus' call and join in God's community;
Only the lost who are found by God;
As long as you're a mistaker, you're going to try harder,
You're going to try to figure it out on your own, you're going to do better;
You're going to hope to convince God that your good outweighs your bad.

Mistakers are all about trusting in themselves to get it right;
Sinners realize I can't, I can't do better on my own.
I need a Savior who loves me despite myself, who comes looking for me;
And who will send His Spirit into me to change me.

I need God to change my heart, to change my life so that I may know God's love for me
I need for God to change me to become more like the person God created me to be;
And to bring me into a community where I am welcomed and loved, just because I am.

An Invitation to Sinners

The quality of our hearts is more important than we can know
In terms of our ability and willingness to follow Jesus and join in God's community.

If we are mistakers, then Jesus' call to follow Him into a community with God;
Into a community where sinners are forgiven and the loveless are loved,
Doesn't really make a lot of sense;
We're really fine, thank you very much and we'll just keep trying.

But if we're honest, if we're willing to really search our hearts and look at our lives,
Then we will find that our actions and our thoughts are not always so good
And may even involve willful turning from God.

And when we reach that moment, when we see our sin, when we see ourselves as sinners,
As persons in need of something or someone to save us from ourselves
Then we will come face to face with the One who has been searching for us all along
And who invites us to a new life, to a new community;
And who invites us to call others into this community of grace and forgiveness
And our turning and their turning will bring joy in heaven and joy in our lives.

So let me invite you to acknowledge the truth about your life and my life
Acknowledge the truth so that we may allow God to forgive us and to change us
And build a community where all are welcomed, all are loved, all are valued;
A community where sinners are particularly welcomed;
And are changed by the sweet grace and mercy and love of God.

Amen.