

**Sermon Notes:** February 9, 2025

**Focus:** What is sin?

[Lectionary Readings](#)

**Isaiah 6** I have a personal connection to Isaiah chapter 6 and Isaiah's experience of sinfulness. The sermon won't be much about Isaiah, but it will be an exploration of how we understand, don't understand, or reject the concept of "sin". When Isaiah 6 came on my radar, I had been an episcopalian for year. I was part of an odd little commune of people who all went to a contemporary worship service at a large Episcopal Church.

Sometimes in worship, we had a Taizé vibe where we would read a passage in different languages. When we read Isaiah 6, I volunteered to read it in German. I barely spoke German then. Now, I can't get past *danke schön* now without being completely lost. During the reading, the middle of verse five reads "ich bin unreiner Lippen." That is translated "I am a man of unclean lips," but my literal brain kept imagining Isaiah as one big set of unclean lips, sort of like a despoiled version of the rolling stones lips logo.

**Stepping into the abyss** That worship group was my entry point into the Episcopal church, but I imported deep concern about my eternal soul. I had confessed that I was a sinner. I had I trusted in the blood of Jesus. But, my evangelically soaked brain was setting off alarm bells because we never talked about bloody, atoning Jesus saving me from damnable thoughts.

It felt like I might as well have been stepping into the open mouth of hell known as the Episcopal Church. My old group "knew" all about those dissolute and feckless Episcopalians. Yet, here I was worshipping in the land of scotch drinking, wing tipped wearing, country clubbers (the church was right next to the fanciest country club in the city.) Surely, I was paving the road to perdition via rally days and cocktail parties.

**Sin** Why am I telling you this? The Episcopal Church of that time *and* today is reluctant to talk about sin and sanctification *unless* it is systemically, environmentally and justice oriented. Can we do both? We can trust the Spirit to sanctify and transform us for our ourselves and others. However, there is a cultural barrier. We are deeply allergic to sounding like "those Christians." I hope we can put an Episcopal shine not just on the systemic concepts, but also on the personal ones. I don't think sin is dirty word, but it has been a weaponized, convoluted or ignored and needs some dusting off.

I was lucky enough to have mentors along the way who *did* help me see where I fell short of God's grace and was not at my best. For my sermon, I want to ponder the way we experience sin and separation, and the way we can practice connection. I did some research this week because I was curious to get my head above my own very limited experience. You don't need this list for the sermon, but I still think it might interest you.

### **What does philosophy, religion, and culture say about sin?**

**African Indigenous** defines wrongdoing as an action that disrupts the balance between humans and nature. Moral failure harms the collective. Disrupting community is sin.

**Buddhism** Sin is not a direct concept, but unwholesome actions (*akusala*) create suffering (*dukkha*) and bad karma.

**Confucianism** Ethical failure is not living according to Ren (humaneness), — wrongdoing is a lack of virtue that disrupts social order.

**Daoism** Moral failure is forcing or resisting the natural flow of life (Wu Wei – effortless action).

**Eastern Orthodox** Sin is a failure to achieve "theosis" (union with God), sin is more about sickness than legal violations.

**Existentialism** (Sartre, Nietzsche) – Sin is religious fantasy. True morality comes from personal authenticity, not external morality. The *system* sins by limiting freedom.

**Hinduism** Sin (pāpa) is a moral failing that generates negative outcomes/karma, affecting the wheel of reincarnation.

***Dalit and Tribal*** Marginalized Hindu groups like Dalits and Adivasis focus on wrongdoing as systems of oppression rather than individual karma.

**Humanism** (Rogers, Maslow) - Morality is based on human reason and consequences rather than divine word. Sin (not a good fit) is the consequence of poor action. "Failure" damages one's growth and self-actualization.

**Islam** Sin (dhanb, haram) is an act of disobedience to Allah. There are major sins (kabair) and minor sins (sagha'ir). Repentance (tawba) can wash away sin.

***African and Southeast Asian Cultures*** In addition to standard Islamic teachings, some communities emphasize honor, where wrongdoing affects one's family and social standing.

**Judaism** Sin (ḥet) is an action that goes against God's commandments but can be atoned for through repentance (teshuvah).

**Latin American Indigenous** Among others, the Mayan concept of sin breaks the reciprocity between humans, nature, and spirit.

**Marxism** When individuals or systems exploit others, it strips the people of their dignity. "Power to the people" leads to less systemic degradation and sin.

**Pacific Islander Indigenous** Moral failure violates sacred law, land, and ancestors.

**Protestant reformation** Adam and Eve rebelled. The only fix is for God to sacrifice Jesus so that we are holy and free to connect with God. You don't want the deal? You get a seat in the smoking section forever. *I felt this in bones as a teenager.*

**Roman Catholicism** Sin is mortal (grave offenses that separate one from God) and venial (less serious offenses).

***Filipino Indigenous & Catholic Synthesis*** Moral failure is losing "Loob" (inner self-integrity) and causing "Hiya" (shame) in the community.

**Utilitarianism** (Stuart Mill, Bentham, Singer) – When an action's consequences that leads to more happiness, and less suffering that lowers "sin."

Hope you enjoyed the laundry list. Thank you for reading.

**Todd**