

As We Are: Rinse & Repeat

October 8, 2023

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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This morning, we are continuing our sermon series, *As We Are*. So far, we have found that while we want to believe that we are limitless, that we are the ones in control, and that we get to decide what is good, in reality, what we often find is quite the opposite, that we do have limits, that we are not in control, and we are broken individuals.

But that does not make it any more easy or more comfortable to admit. Again and again, we often try to avoid putting ourselves in that light or seeing ourselves that way. Instead, we are more comfortable doing anything else. And rather than looking **WITHIN OURSELVES** to see the root of our problem, we tend to focus on something or someone else as the source of our problems.

Did you catch that in our Gospel reading for today? While it certainly is about forgiveness, let me share it with you again that you might see the focus of the unjust servant: "...the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him 10,000 talents. And since he couldn't pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had and payment to be made" (Matt 18:23-25).

"The servant fell on his knees, imploring [the king], 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt" (Matt 18:26-27).

"But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him 100 denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' And his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with

him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ But he refused and put his fellow servant into prison until he should pay his debt” (Matt 18:28-30).

Of course, this was reported to the master, so the master summoned the servant and said to him, ““You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”” (Matt 18:32-33). So he delivers the servant to the jailers until he should pay all his debt.

You see, the servant did not focus on the problem within himself, but he focused externally on the one who owed him money as the source of his problem. And when we blame our circumstances—like the person we live with, the place where we live, or the place that we work—we can fall into something that David Zahl calls in his book, *Low Anthropology*, as the *if-only routine*.

You know this routine. *If only* you lived in a bigger house, your family would get along better. *If only* you and your spouse were not so busy, you would have more time for one another. *If only* your son had more outdoor time, he would not be so wild and keep getting into trouble at school. Or, *if only* you were not dealing with a health issue right now, you would not have to struggle as much and would be in a better mood.

It does not necessarily mean that things would be different if all your *if-only*’s would come true. But it does mean that you are most likely avoid the fact that you *HAVE LIMITS*, that you are *NOT IN CONTROL*, and you are *BROKEN*.

But you are not alone. Often in many of our social interactions with others, we can project who we want to be, and not who we actually are. It is what therapist, Esther Perel, refers to as the *tyranny of positivity*. It is all around us. All you need to do is look at social media, and you might get the sense

that everyone around you is successful, smiling, and having the time of their lives. All their relationships are wonderful. They all live in perfectly clean houses, have the most fulfilling jobs of all, and are blessed with 2.5 kids with promising future careers.

And while real life can include all those things, it can also include other things as well. Despite what you might see on social media, all of us from time to time can get anxious, sensitive, obsessive, confused, insecure, and even at odds with ourselves. We can feel a whole range of emotions, not just those that are positive. There are times when we can grieve a loss or feel lonely. There are times when we can get angry or feel sad. There are times when we can have regrets or doubts. And yet, when these “other things” consume us, because we tend to turn inward, we can be left feeling depressed and hopeless as well.

So, if the PROBLEM is INSIDE us, and the SOLUTION is not found WITHIN US, *where do we find the solution?* It is found in our Epistle reading for today. As we heard, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). Jesus alone heals our brokenness because He is the One who died for all—your sins and mine—that we might be redeemed once again.

Through the waters of Holy Baptism, we are received into the family of faith and adopted as sons and daughters of God. As our Epistle reading goes on to say, “And because you are sons [and daughters], God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave [to sin] but a son [or daughter], and if a son [or daughter], then an heir through God.” (Gal 4:6-7)

I wonder if any of you remember the movie, *The Incredibles*. It was a movie that came out in 2004 by Pixar, depicting an animated superhero/crime-fighting family. And in the movie, there’s a scene where

the dad, “Bob” cannot stop thinking about his days as a superhero. So much so that he finds himself stuck in his old life. And it is then that his wife, “Helen” confronts him. (<https://youtu.be/IYxx-8wQSO0> [1:00-1:27])

I share that clip with you because you do not have to feel like you are stuck in life. As the 4th section of Luther’s *Small Catechism* on Baptism points out: we come to understand that Baptism indicates that the Old sinful Adam in us needs to be drowned through DAILY REPENTANCE of turning away from our sins, so that we might not become stuck in a sinful life. This means that when we confess that we have limits, that we are not in control, and that we are broken individuals in need of God’s forgiveness. God gives us His mercy and grace again and again so that as His own, we might have God’s solution for our lives, and live with Him, both now and always.

Let’s pray: *Lord Jesus, we thank you for your gifts of forgiveness, grace, and mercy. Enable us, as your sons and daughters in Christ, to turn to You each and every day so that we might not be stuck in our old sinful lives, filled with guilt and shame, but rather, again and again, be filled with hope and new life in You. In Jesus Name, Amen.*