

What arrests me in today's reading from Philippians are Paul's tears. Paul weeps for those who, in the words of today's collect, "have gone astray from (God's) ways." Paul so cares about people that their disobedience and destruction cause him great grief. *"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even in tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction..."*

On this 2cd Sunday in Lent, I want to talk about two ways we walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. That is strong language. And, one wonders, what will our all-powerful God do to His enemies? The ways of seem opposite at first, but are bedfellows in opposition to God's ways. Talking about what leads us to be enemies of the cross is best done with tears, or at least grief, because we are talking about people's lives, - our lives - lives that are damaged and destroyed by going astray from God's ways.

Jesus spoke with this kind of grief and longing in today's gospel as he lamented, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not. Behold, you are forsaken."* Then, Luke tells us, Jesus wept over Jerusalem.

The first way that we walk as enemies of the cross is fairly obvious – the sins of the flesh, all the ways that we break God's law. God's law is for our good; we are happiest when we obey God's law. Although the world and the devil tell us that God's law restricts our freedom and happiness, the opposite is true. Following God's law leads to our human happiness.

The example I'll use today is also obvious: sex. As I think Freud is right about our libidinal impulses from cradle to grave, it is as universal as it is obvious. Despite current debates in the mainline Church, God's law about sex is clear. Sex is intended for a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman. It is not meant for a man and man, or a woman and a woman. It is also not meant man and a woman who are not married. This is God's law as expressed in the Bible. Going astray from God's ways leads to our destruction and should cause us to ask, "What does God do to His enemies?"

Sometimes sex outside of marriage doesn't seem like it would lead to our destruction, especially when every voice in the culture says the opposite. And especially when your heart leads the way.

Back in 1992 Woody Allen defended his love for Soon-Yi. Soon-Yi was the adopted teenage daughter of Mia Farrow, Allen's longtime lover. Allen fell in love with Soon-Yi and soon began a sexual relationship. When asked by Time Magazine how he

could get involved with someone who was almost his daughter, Allen said, *"The heart wants what it wants."*

I like Woody Allen. I like his honesty. I like his insight into the human heart. I like his insight into my heart. The heart wants what it wants. I really resonate with this. There are so many times when I just pursue what I want to pursue, regardless of the consequence. Because the heart wants what it wants, we convince ourselves that God's Law about sex is wrong, or outdated, or misinterpreted. The heart wants what it wants. So we justify same sex marriage. Or we justify the casual hook-up. And the more we justify sin, the more hardened we become to it.

For instance, what used to be called the walk of shame – the next morning walk home from the previous night's hook up – is now called the walk of fame. What is morally wrong is first justified then finally celebrated. It breaks my heart to see girls making that walk in their heels and a borrowed shirt while I'm on my way to our 7:45 church service.

90 years before Woody Allen's interview with Time Magazine, the Bishop of Idaho, Bishop Funston, shed some theological light on Allen's comment. He wrote a piece a little collection called "Lent: The Holy Season", published in 1902 by Thirty Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Bishop Funston, by the way, is parishoner Susie Heartwell's great grandfather. He went to VMI and UVA Law School before he surrendered to a different call.

Bishop Funston wrote, *"The mystery of sin we cannot explain, but the evidences of it abound within our hearts and in the world around us. Unhappily, however, we are too often blinded to the true nature of sin. Like the sirens of old, sins are by their deceitful allurements destroying many...who are unconscious of any real danger."*

The diabolical nature of sin is such that we are sometimes immune to the real hurt caused to ourselves and others by going astray from God's ways. This is true for any sin, not just sexual sin. Our eyes gradually become accustomed to the dark. And before we know it, we prefer the dark. The light hurts our eyes. We are too often blinded to the true nature of sin.

But, sometimes, thankfully we are not. We see the evidences of sin in our lives and in the world around us. This is painful when it happens, but is the work of God. You hit your thumb with a hammer and it hurts. So, you stop hitting your thumb. Your heart is ripped apart by your hook-up; the heartbreak is God's gift to you; it is an indicator that you are pursuing your own destruction and it is time to stop walking as an enemy of the cross.

The other way that we walk as enemies of the cross is not by our obvious badness, but by resting in our own presumed goodness as we judge others who in our view are bad. If you listened to the first part of the sermon with an attitude of superiority or judgment, then you are walking as an enemy of the cross. If I am

preaching this sermon in condescension or with finger wagging, then I am an enemy of the cross.

This is where Paul's tears are so important. He loved the sinner. We often hear people say, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." Most of the time our distaste for the sin bleeds into our judgment of the sinner. The sinner is indistinguishable from the sin.

To walk in God's ways means not only repenting of the bad, but also repenting of the good. What do I mean? Think about the parable of the prodigal Son. Both sons were sinners. The younger son sinned in the obvious ways: women and wild living. The older son sinned by trusting in his good works as the older, responsible son. In the story, the younger son repented and was given a feast.

The story doesn't end with the feast, however. The story ends with the older son, unrepentant, left outside in the cold and dark, unwilling to give up his pride, anger and judgment at his younger brother. We can also assume that he resents his father for forgiving such a profligate slacker.

To walk as an enemy of the cross to see yourself as better than others, more deserving than others, more righteous than others. It is to say that I am not saved by grace through faith; I'm saved by my works or by my character. To walk as an enemy of the cross is to say that Christ's atoning death on the cross really doesn't apply to you, since you a good person. Remember: If I'm O.K and You're O.K. then what is He doing up on the cross?

This second version of being an enemy of the cross is so much more insidious than the first. The scripture says that Jesus came to save "sinners." If you do not see yourself in that category, then you cannot be saved. You will also be insufferable to be around. You will be so insufferable that God will not even want to be around you. He came not to call the righteous, but the unrighteous.

To go astray from God's ways by obvious sin or by trust in your own righteousness is to walk as an enemy of the cross. The question is: What does our all-powerful God do to His enemies? Well, God tells us what He does to His enemies. He died for them. He saved them. *"While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son."*

Jesus shed his tears and his blood on the cross as He prayed for those who walked as his enemies, saying "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." What does God do to His enemies? God loves and forgives and saves His enemies. God loves and forgives and saves you who are saved by grace through faith.

It is true that the heart wants what it wants. My prayer for us this Lent 2010 is that God will give us hearts that want Him and His ways. Amen.

