

Introduction:

- **GK Chesterton** (the English journalist) was asked by The Times of London to respond in the form of an article to the question: “What’s wrong with the world?” Chesterton replied: “I am. Yours truly, GK Chesterton.”
- The **Genesis** passage deals with God’s destruction of a sinful generation, the **Psalmist** implores the Lord not to remember his sins, **Peter’s** letter deals with Christ dying for our sin & The **Gospel** relates how Jesus, the sinless Saviour, receives John’s baptism of repentance. After which Jesus calls people to repent and believe the Good News.
- Each of our texts deal in some way with human sin and our need for repentance, yet most of us are uncomfortable, possibly even defensive when it come to the issue of confession, few of us have the boldness in the way Chesterton did.

- **Ravi Zacherais** tells the story of two brothers from a small town, well known for their crooked, as could be, business dealings.
- Never the less their wealth increased and they prospered until the sudden death of one of the brothers.
- The surviving brother searched out a minister for the funeral, and made an offer to the minister that was hard to refuse.
- “I will pay you a great sum, if you will do me one favor. In eulogizing my brother, I want you to call him a saint.”
- The minister, well aware of the brothers’ bad reputation, was a shrewd pragmatist and agreed to comply. Why not? The church needed a new roof.
- The day of the funeral service arrived and people converged in their droves, expecting to be vindicated by the public exposure of the man’s character. They were, of course, unaware of the deal made for the eulogy.
- At last the much awaited for moment arrived, and the minister spoke.
- “The man you see in the coffin was a vile and debauched individual. He was a liar, a thief, a deceiver, a manipulator, a reprobate and a hedonist. He destroyed the fortunes, careers and lives of countless people in this town. But compared to his brother here, *he was a saint.*”
- Most of us can feel good about ourselves when we compare ourselves to a person we consider having less moral fiber.

Bridge:

- **Lent** is traditionally a time to invest more energy into spiritual disciplines as a means of preparing ourselves for Easter.
- The Gospel writer asserts that the Spirit drove Jesus into the “wilderness”. This is the same word used when Jesus casts out demons.
- Are we willing to take a chance with God; and be cast out into the wilderness, to deal with the beasts, our temptations, sins, our demons?

1. Personal Sin & Corporate Sin

- **Michel Quoist** wrote the following prayer about temptation:

I'm at the end of my tether, Lord

I am shattered,

I am broken.

Since this morning I have been struggling to escape temptation, which, now subtle, now pervasive, now tender, now sensuous, dances before me like a glamour girl at a fair.

I do not know what to do.

I do not know where to go.

It spies on me, follows me, engulfs me.

When I leave a room I find it seated and waiting for me in the next.

When I seize a newspaper, there it is, hidden in the words of a harmless story;

I go out, and see it smiling at me on an unknown face,

I turn away and look at the wall, and it leaps at me from a poster.

I return to work, to find it dozing on my files, and when I gather my papers it awakens.

In despair, I take my poor head in my hands, I shut my eyes to see nothing,

But I discover that it is more alive than ever, comfortably settled within me.

For it has broken my door open, it has slipped into my body, my veins.

To the very tips of my fingers.

It has seeped into the crevices of my memory

And sings into the ear of my imagination

It plays on my nerves as on the strings of a guitar.

I don't know where I stand, Lord.

I don't know whether or not I want this sin that beckons to me.

I no longer know whether I pursue it or am perused.

I am dizzy, and the void draws me as it draws the rash mountaineer who can neither advance nor retreat.

Lord, Lord, help me!

- Those of us who, have had the courage to, acknowledge our secret sins and addictions can easily relate to these words.
- Possibly we have prayed similar words to God or even confided in a trusted friend or counselor.
- May this time of lent be one where we more intentionally confess our sins to both God and trusted people in our community.
- The problem with reading a prayer like this is that most of us think of 'physical' sins; drugs, alcohol abuse, eating disorders, & things of a sexual nature etc.
- What about greed, pride, manipulation, & selfishness etc.

- What about our corporate sins?
- Our refusal to take seriously the environmental crisis in our world.
- Not challenging destructive aspects of masculinity accepted by our society
- Our passive acceptance of abuse inflicted on humans, esp. women and children.
- Many of us have not taken seriously Christ's love for all; especially the poor and marginalized
- We are often willing to be concerned for the poor so long as it does not inconvenience us.
- We say we love all people but we would rather not have to deal with Homosexual people in our church.
- Many of us have failed to be generous with our time and money.

2. Covenant & Kingdom

- Quite a depressing litany of sins isn't it.
- However we are not without forgiveness, hope and inspiration!
- The passages we read today spoke of God's covenants with us, including the rainbow and the sacrament of baptism.
- This is the outrageous and scandalous grace of God; that God chooses to establish a covenant with us rather than a contract.
- Henri Nouwen "A Contract finishes when one of the partners does not adhere to his/her promises"
- We live in a world of contracts – Tit for tat – There is no such thing as a free lunch
- When we are complimented most of us at least are thinking; "what do you want"
- Yet God does not choose to deal with us on a contractual basis, God is the God of Covenant.
- Even though we break our part of the covenant, God remains faithful.
- Henri Nouwen "in a covenant, there is no condition put on faithfulness. It is the unconditional commitment to be of service."
- No matter what our sin or sins, God longs to receive us, forgive us and redeem us!
- However, God loves us too much to leave us where we are.
- "The Kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the Good news"
- Imagine a community that shares with each other, Loves one another, and Worships together; imaging the kingdom coming very near!

Benediction:

- May your spiritual discipline this Lent, whatever it may be, lead to repentance and forgiveness. May God's Kingdom come, now and always.

Amen

