

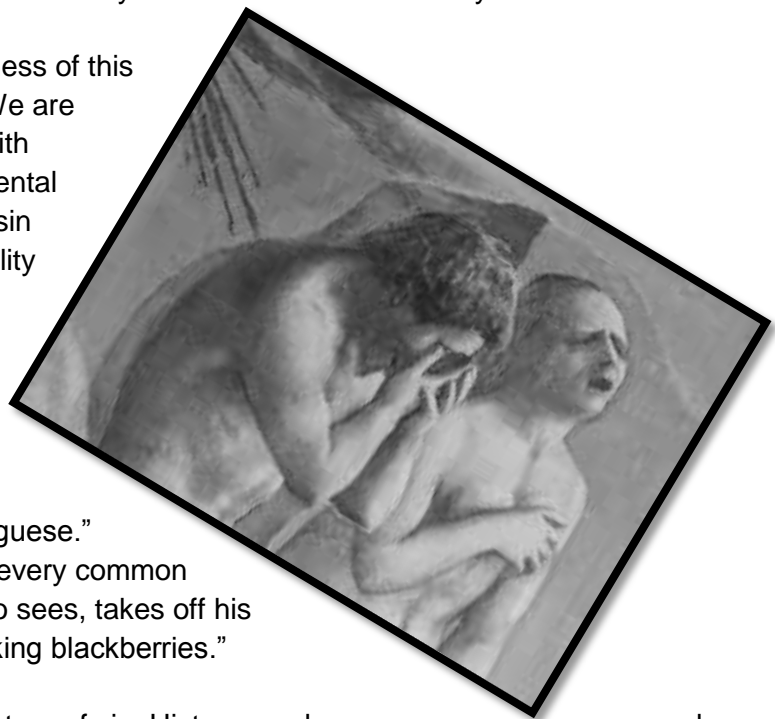
## To Heal the Sin Sick Soul

I wish to reclaim one of the ancient purposes of the church – to heal the sin sick soul. For too long we who self-identify as “progressive” have allowed our flock to fall ill and convulse, as we argue the merits of the linguistics of sin. Yes, my friends, sin does exist. I know this not because the bible tells me so, I know this for our world seems mired in the results of sin: hatred, animosity, greed, bitterness, and so on.

One of the purposes of our congregations is to be about healing the sin sick and the sin bashed soul. The number of folks wandering in the wilderness is staggering, for all of us are somehow touched by the void which seems to be the very antithesis of created reality.

Some are touched by the sheer vastness of this void. It is as if the void encircles all. We are nameless, directionless, homeless, with “reality” simply the name for the incidental point at which we happen to be. The sin sick soul is the soul that mistrusts reality to be more than the see-touch world around us. For these “sinners” Jesus comes as the messiah who opens the eyes, changing our perspective into a new awareness. Elizabeth Barrett Browning speaks of such perception in her “Songs of the Portuguese.”

“Earth’s crammed with heaven / And every common bush afire with God / But only he, who sees, takes off his shoes / The rest of us set around picking blackberries.”



Some are touched by the systemic nature of sin. History can be a purposeless struggle; a narrative of chaos and violence; the meaningless repetition of evil in a directionless rise and fall of things. The sin sick soul is the soul that is impotent to struggle for the kin-dom of God here on earth as it is in heaven. For such “sinners” Jesus is the liberating messiah who has come to set the captive free and who invites us to set history aright. Allan Boesak of South Africa states, “God will ask, ‘Where are your wounds?’ And we will say, ‘We have no wounds.’ And God will say, ‘Was there nothing worth fighting for?’”

Some are touched by the internal emptiness of a false self. There is a vacuum behind the façade of what we appear to be, and we can come to watch life from behind a “me” that “I” regret knowing. Rudolph Bultman spoke to this particular sin sickness. “The inauthentic self is one smothered in the ‘has been,’ paralyzed by the ‘can be,’ hiding from authenticity through mass anonymity and or material accumulation.” The sin sick soul is the soul who has missed the mark of genuineness. For such “sinners” Jesus comes as the model human, teaching us how to be whole while loving us into wholeness.

Some are touched by an embedded sin: that which lies in the very lining of our egos and gives rise to our will to dominate in order that we might survive. Our tendency is to drift toward arrogance, to play God by idolizing who we are and what we possess (a major temptation for North Americans). In short we participate in hubris. The sin sick soul is the soul which willfully, intentionally, and with relish, rebels against love. Jesus Christ is the savior who comes to redeem us out of our sin and to reorient us from self-aggrandizement to self-sacrifice. When the United Church of Christ invokes, "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here," we invoked God's offer of salvation, forgiveness, and restoration.

Some are touched by the tediousness of daily living. Nothing ever changes in a substantial and sustainable way. What lords it over us today, may one day be replaced, but we will still be lorded over. In the face of recalcitrant and intractable powers we feel we are setting at the foot of a tsunami, existing on the edge of absurdity. The Jewish theologian Richard Rubenstein, in the face of the Holocaust, gives voice to this particular sin sickness, "The promise of a radical novelty in the human condition is a pathetic illusion." The sin sick soul is the soul that gives up and gives in. For these "sinners" Jesus comes as the suffering servant stretched out upon the cross of the world with us. W. Paul Jones states it quite eloquently, "As we scream over the way things are for us, so God Screams over the way things are for God."

Do we have sin sick souls in our communities of faith? Yes, we do. Have we been equipped to bring a healing balm into the lives of these souls? Yes, we have. So let us get to work being the disciples of Jesus and extend his healing presence to a world groaning in sin sickness. Then we will understand the beautiful Easter affirmation – Christ is alive, and through him, we are made alive as well.