

Sermon of Gospel John 4:5-42- year A

Barbara Monahan March 8, 2026

Our sin is not the end of the road because God is providing us with what we need to deepen our relationship with him.

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier

What is your first thought when you hear the word sin?

The Book of Common Prayer's Catechism defines sin this way:

"Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation," and I add with ourselves.¹

As you know, we are in the Lenten season, this being the third Sunday, and the focus is on sin.

I find the collect today to be very powerful as it asks God to "keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls that we may be defended from all adversaries which may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul, because **we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves.**"

This statement is very comforting to me, because try as I might, I sin!

I need God's help, and God graciously provides it through mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation, and redemption.

The key here is to let my sin go once I confess it because God forgives and forgets, and we are to do the same.

We may be assured that our sin is not the end of the road because God is providing us with what we need to deepen our relationship with him.

Just as he provided the Hebrew people with water as they wandered in the desert.

What seems impossible for us is very possible for God.

We sin, and when we seek God's help, we receive it.

The Lenten season is a perfect reminder of this fact and provides time for us to reflect on how we might want to shift our lives to be more God-centered.

"Sin is not only obvious wrong actions, but any choosing of self over God's will, such as selfishness, pride, greed, envy, hatred, violence, deception, and so on."²

The penitential order from the BCP that we prayed earlier also stresses that sin includes what we fail to do, omissions, and names it as "thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone."³

"Sin's effect is relational: it breaks our relationship with God, harms our relationships with others and ourselves, and damages creation.

¹ BCP, Catechism, p. 848

² IBID.

³ Penitential Order I & II

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*Because of that distortion, sin can have power over us and limit our freedom.*⁴

And I think the limiting of freedom is where we might go astray, because we think that by following God's will, our freedom is restricted.

Yet, being aligned with God's will provides the most freedom we could ever experience because we receive the fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which are much better than the vices of sin: selfishness, pride, greed, envy, hatred, violence, and deception.

Let's take a look at how sin affects our freedom and relationships.

I have three real-life, everyday examples for you and a handout with all eight examples at the back of the church:

First example: People-pleasing that becomes dishonesty

We say yes when we mean no. This avoids the hard truth about our availability and prevents us from speaking plainly by saying,

Thank you for the opportunity, but I am unavailable at this time.

We lose our freedom because we become controlled by others' reactions; We can't act with integrity because we're managing impressions.

This affects our relationships because we create relationships that are built on anxiety rather than truth.

Second: Resentment that keeps us "stuck."

We replay a conversation or nurture a grievance for days because we want someone to "get what they deserve."

We lose our freedom because our mood and attention get hijacked, and we can't be fully present with people we love.

This affects our relationships because we quietly train our hearts away from mercy.

Third: Using substances, screens, or busyness to numb

We think we just need a drink to take the edge off, we doomscroll late at night, or overwork to avoid feeling.

We lose our freedom because we lose the ability to choose, and our coping strategy starts choosing us.

This affects our relationships because we stop praying,

we are not present to those we love, and we lose out on real connection.

⁴ BCP, Catechism, p. 848

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“Because sin is both personal and social, repentance includes inward contrition, concrete changes of life, reconciliation with others, and justice work to repair structural wrongdoing.”⁵

“The good news of the Gospel is that through Jesus Christ, we receive mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation and redemption: God sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death when we repent and are reconciled.”⁶

The very first line of today’s scripture from Exodus states, “from the wilderness of sin, meaning that the Israelites were free from the Egyptian oppression in the wilderness, yet they were in a broken relationship with God because of their lack of faith and trust in God.

They were complaining to Moses for the lack of water, and the last line of the scripture passage reveals their unfaithfulness when they said, “is the Lord among us or not?”

They did not trust or believe that God was with them.

Then God sent Moses ahead to have water flow from a stone to provide the Israelites with the nourishment they needed.

We can relate to this, too.

It has been a long time since Jesus lived, and our faith is based on what ancient people experienced and shared in the Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

It is easy for us to live our lives without one thought about God.

Just like the Israelites wandering through the desert for 40 years,

we may wander through our lives without the nourishment God provides, not because we are bad people but because we have a distorted view of ourselves and who we believe God is in our lives and the world.

Remember, in Genesis, when God created us, he created us as **very good**. We miss out on the nourishment God provides because, as the collect states today, **we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves**.

We need God’s power in our lives in order to develop and deepen our relationship with God.

Our relationship then reveals how God is working in our lives, something the Israelites could not see on their own until Moses revealed it to them by providing water from a rock.

Our sin tells us that we forget to see ourselves as God sees us.

⁵ Connections commentary

⁶ IBID

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My husband and I are first-time grandparents and enjoy babysitting our granddaughter.

Each time I am with her, God reveals God's self through her natural growth and resilience that we are all created with.

Babies are pure and innocent; they are very good.

They know how to communicate their needs to us without any training.

They intuitively know what they need and how to get it.

Their cuteness makes it all the easier for us to respond with joy to their call for nourishment and care.

This is how God sees us.

We are God's babies, pure, innocent, growing, and very good, especially as we mature into adults.

John's Gospel shows us how powerful it can be to see ourselves as God sees us, through the story of Jesus' visit with a Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.

Now for background, the Jewish and Samaritan people did not get along with one another so Jesus and this woman were at risk of being called out for their encounter, as we read that the disciples chose not to do; "They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"⁷

The Samaritan woman went to the well in the afternoon because she knew the town's women would not be there.

The custom was for the women to draw the day's water in the morning when the weather was cool.

The Samaritan woman did not want to be judged by her peers,

so she went to the well in the afternoon, which makes her witness about Jesus being the Messiah to the whole town very brave and courageous.

John's gospel lesson contains tensions between the nationalities of the Samaritans and the Israelites, between the gender of the woman at the well

and that of Jesus and the disciples, between sinner and sinless.

How does Jesus deal with these tensions?

Does he ignore or disrespect the woman?

⁷ John 4:5-42

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No, he sat with her, asked for water, and taught her that he was the living water that satisfies her spiritual thirst.

Jesus then revealed that he understood her marital status and current relationship, and he helped her see that he was not an ordinary man or prophet. Finally, Jesus told her that he was the long-awaited Messiah.”⁸

Jesus’ conversation and acceptance of her sparked her response to go into town, even though she knew she was not liked or respected, to tell the townspeople about Jesus the Messiah.

This story teaches us that nothing gets in the way of our relationship with Jesus or our ability to go and tell others to come and see, when we see ourselves and others as Jesus sees us.

What adjectives come to mind when you think of yourself or when you look at yourself in a mirror?

Do you see yourself as God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit see you?

As pure, innocent, remarkable, magnificent, one of a kind master piece?

Listen to these words from Psalm 139:

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.

³You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high; I cannot attain it.

For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well.

Our work is, first and foremost, to see ourselves as God sees us because it is then that we may extend that view toward others.

Just like Jesus did with the many people he served, and especially as we hear today, with the Samaritan woman.

⁸ Connections Commentary 1 pg. 72-73

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He was able to approach her and have a life-changing conversation because he saw her as wonderfully made.

And she was then able to go to the townspeople to share what she had received because she saw them with Jesus' eyes!

Spend some time this week reading Psalm 139 and pondering the effects of everyday sins in our relationships and on our freedom.

As you do, ask Jesus to show you how he sees you in your life and how you may get to have his vision for yourself and others.

Seeing and knowing our true selves, as Jesus does, enables us to be in a healthy, life-giving relationship with ourselves, God, and all of creation.

It is through this shift in our perspective that we receive the freedom to live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

It is through this type of living that we may invite others to faith through our courageous witness, just like the Samaritan Woman did.

Be free in knowing that God is with you, offering a path to a life that is free of guilt, shame, selfishness, pride, greed, envy, hatred, violence, and deception because you are intimately known by God who sees you as his wonderfully made masterpiece of love and joy!

Amen.

Handout:

The effects of everyday sins on our relationships and freedom.

The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) puts it plainly: "Sin is the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and with all creation," and "sin has power over us because we lose our liberty when our relationship with God is distorted" (BCP, Catechism).

1) Dishonesty (lies, half-truths, omission)

How it limits freedom: A lie requires remembering and maintaining more lies; it creates fear of being found out and narrows choices.

How it affects relationships: It destroys trust, so people withdraw or respond defensively.

A pastoral step: Own the truth where possible, ask forgiveness, repair harm; practice transparency in small matters to rebuild trust.

2) Addiction or compulsive behavior (alcohol, screens, work, gambling)

How it limits freedom: Compulsion narrows a person's choices and binds attention and energy to a habit they no longer fully control.

How it affects relationships: Loved ones feel neglected, betrayed, or burdened; intimacy and reliability suffer.

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A pastoral step: Seek help (support groups, counselors, pastoral care), name the dependency in prayer and community, and receive grace as you take small disciplined steps toward recovery.

3) Envy and comparison

How it limits freedom: Envy steals joy and constantly measures life against others, making one a prisoner of want.

How it affects relationships: It undermines rejoicing in others' gifts and can lead to resentment or passive aggression.

A pastoral step: Practice gratitude, celebrate others' gifts aloud, and cultivate contentment through prayer and service.

4) Unforgiveness and grudges

How it limits freedom: Holding a grudge keeps attention fixed on the injury; it makes one emotionally captive to the past.

How it affects relationships: It poisons present interactions and blocks reconciliation.

A pastoral step: Name the hurt in prayer, seek counsel or mediation, and when safe, offer or ask for forgiveness — trusting the Spirit to accompany the hard work of reconciliation.

5) Gossip and slander

How it limits freedom: Gossip binds the gossipier to a false narrative and fear of consequences; it narrows moral imagination.

How it affects relationships: It wounds reputations and breaks communal trust.

A pastoral step: Stop repeating what harms, make amends where possible, and practice speaking well of others.

6) Greed and hoarding (overvaluing possessions, exploiting others)

How it limits freedom: Attachment to things enslaves the heart and narrows generosity.

How it affects relationships: It can lead to exploitation, inequality, and relational isolation.

A pastoral step: Practice sacrificial giving, stewardship, and acts of service to reorient toward God and neighbor.

7) Pride and refusal to acknowledge fault

How it limits freedom: Pride makes apology difficult and keeps us bound to self-image rather than reality.

How it affects relationships: It prevents reconciliation and authentic intimacy.

A pastoral step: Cultivate humility in prayer, confess faults honestly, and receive correction as a form of spiritual growth.

8) Neglect of worship, prayer, and Sabbath rest

How it limits freedom: Losing regular practices with God narrows spiritual resources and leaves us more vulnerable to other sins.

How it affects relationships: Without the center of worship, relationships can become transactional or superficial.

A pastoral step: Reclaim small rhythms (weekly worship, daily prayer, Sabbath) and lean on the community for support.

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Hope and remedy rooted in our tradition

The BCP teaches that the Ten Commandments and the Catechism show us both our duty and our need for redemption; they name how sin distorts relationships and liberty (BCP, Catechism). The Penitential Order reminds us that confession is our way back: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves; but if we confess our sins, God is faithful and will forgive us” (BCP, Penitential Order; see 1 John 1:8–9 quoted there).

Redemption “sets us free from the power of evil, sin, and death” (BCP, Catechism). The sacraments, prayer, penitence, community accountability, and simple acts of repair are the ordinary means by which God restores freedom and mends relationships.