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AMOS - PART II:

Fr. Ed Elsey, OSJ

Injustice permeates our world, yet as Christians we often turn a blind eye to the suffering of others for “more important” work like praying, preaching, and teaching. But the book of Amos reminds us that those works, while unquestionably central to a believer’s life, ring hollow when we don’t love and serve others in our own lives. Do you find yourself falling into that trap at times—prioritizing prayer over service?

References in our first part of the study are of the Samaritans - the Samaritans - who after the captivity were sent by Assyria to mingle with the Hebrew population - even offering to help them to rebuild the Temple, though rejected as ‘tarnished’ by the orthodox purists at the time. They were viewed with suspicion or rejection by the Jews. Remember Christ used them in a famous story of the attacked pilgrim and the woman at the well. They had a temple on Mt Gerizim [Jn 4]. Xenophobia and wariness of foreigners is a difficulty for many in our time. Get over it, says Amos.

The prophecy of Amos should simplify the choices in our lives. Instead of choosing between prayer and service, the book of Amos teaches us that both are essential. God has called Christians not only to be in relationship with Him but also to be in relationships with others.

For those Christians whose tendency has been to focus more on the invisible God than on His visible creation, Amos pulls us back toward the center, where both the physical and the spiritual needs of people matter in God's scheme of justice.

But if you have watched and waited in frustration as government commissions and enquiries seem to take endless time to report back and even more time to get change happening and justice being declared and honoured, you must try and imagine how frustrating prophets felt when God had given them a message and it seemed to have been consistently ignored or abandoned. But this is God speaking. Can you not hear? Will you not respond? We ask ourselves whether sometimes we are as obdurate and obstinate in refusing to heed what God has instructed us in His Word.

Martin Luther King in his famous speech 'I have a dream' quoted Amos as he too had a vision:

But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. [5:24 KJV]...or let judgment pour down as water, and righteousness as an impassable torrent.

MAJOR INJUSTICES IN OUR WORLD TODAY.

1. Health and nutrition are fundamental for a productive and fulfilling life. And without a healthy population, countries can't make the most of people's skills and energies. Since 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed vulnerabilities in our global health systems, allowing progress on other diseases to go into reverse, and creating a new urgency to ensure every country and every person has access to life-saving vaccines.

The UK formerly prioritised global health, for example, as a leading donor to organisations such as Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, previously at the forefront of global efforts to overcome malnutrition around the world, as well as putting significant resources into global COVID response.

2. Every child deserves an education. Getting a good quality education helps children grow into healthier adults with better prospects in life, who can use their own voice and utilise their power for change, stability to children who are displaced, contribute to gender equality, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and contribute to a healthy planet. The UK Government has said it is committed to ensuring all girls have the right to 12 years of quality education, and between 2015 and 2020, the Department for International Development supported at least 15.6 million children to gain a decent education.

3. Overseas Development Assistance [ODA = AID] alleviates poverty and contributes to sustainable development around the globe. UK aid is widely seen as highly effective, and its programmes are among the most transparent in the world. Most believe we have a moral duty to stand alongside people in developing countries. UK aid has immunised over 56 million children, saving 990,000 lives. Last year's UK pledge to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance is to immunise up to 75 million children over the next five years.

4. Gender variation. The stigma which accompanied the AIDS epidemic in the 70s and 80s is largely decreasing except in rigid African and strongly Catholic territories.

LGBTQ+ includes all sexual orientation varieties and interpretations and people seeking to 'be who they are' instead of what used to be thought as God wanted or intended them to be, is becoming the norm especially amongst the younger generation.

Our own views are usually very personal. Priest counsellors, like me, know the tragedy of persecution and misunderstanding for people who have suffered thus, and have witnessed the most appalling prejudice and injustice. Suicide and early deaths have abounded. The Ministry of Defence only now has acknowledged the ghastly wrong practised on those with alternative gender.

What right have any of us to discriminate on something we barely understand? Hate crimes are wrong anywhere in the world. Who was it who said: Let him who is without sin cast the first stone? Ah yes. Follow the Master.

With great power comes great responsibility. And even more so when God is involved: Israel had been chosen by God to be different. They were God's holy people; they had been given his law. He brought them out of Egypt and liberated them from bondage. And yet, we discover, they are guilty too. Their sin has been seen by God, and he is angry. They have forgotten that their existence was supposed to be for God's glory, to lead those around them to worship of the Lord. They were supposed to live differently from surrounding nations. Instead, they've just blended in.

Such hypocrisy is not an ancient sin of which only the Israelites were guilty. It is my sin, our sin, and arguably also the sin of the church at large today – individually and corporately.

Perhaps we can begin this year by doing something brave and naming our own failings before we point the finger at others.

Acknowledging and repenting of our unforgiving attitude to another's mistakes in the workplace, or our judgmental eye on someone else's parenting. Like it or not, we're no better than anyone else. The only difference is that we have known forgiveness. That is why we can freely acknowledge our sin, because we know that – through Jesus' sacrifice – it has been cast as far as the east is from the west.

Author W H Vanstone in his challenging book 'The Stature of Waiting', writes...
'We set great store by activity and busy-ness. We want to be 'in control'. We value what we 'do' more than who we are. So when we become ill, or retire from work, or suffer an enforced period of inactivity, our self-esteem is threatened. We evade, repudiate, or resent experiences of passivity, of waiting.'

This classic of spiritual writing transforms our understanding of the experiences of illness, or of being out of work, or feeling inactive and powerless.

Vanstone shows us the unquestioned and impressive majesty of Jesus as he 'waits' before those who accuse him, waits before those who taunt him and, finally, waits before even those who crucify him. It is in his passivity and 'passion', when we have things done to us instead of doing things, the times when we simply wait, are as important as the times of action and taking charge.

DID THEY EVER LEARN? Seek Me and Live [Amos 5, 1-6]

Hear this word, Israel, this lament I take up concerning you: 'Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again, deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.'

This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Israel:

'Your city that marches out a thousand strong will have only a hundred left; your town that marches out a hundred strong will have only ten left.'

This is what the LORD says to Israel: 'Seek me and live; do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba.

For Gilgal will surely go into exile: Bethel will be reduced to nothing.'

Seek the LORD and live, or he will sweep through the tribes of Joseph like a fire; it will devour them, and Bethel will have no one to quench it.

A leading spiritual writer recently declared: 'You're going to be hit by a bus!' then followed up with: "Do you read that statement as a warning, or a threat? It probably depends on the context: spoken by a mother to a child who refuses to look both ways before crossing the road, it's a warning. But spoken by an angry public transport official with a vendetta against your life, it's probably a threat. Warnings encourage and hopefully elicit a change in behaviour, whereas threats are statements of another's intent outside of our control".

When we read prophetic words like Amos's it's easy to read them as threats. But throughout the Bible, prophecy is more often than not used as a warning designed to avert what is being said from ever happening: if the hearers of the prophet's words heed the warning and do something about it, turn from evil and seek God), and all crises can probably be averted, or turned to good.

With this brief study, we have learned something important about God: He is responsive to our actions. This is a God who is sovereign, all-powerful, who can do anything in response to our sin and failures. As scholar Walter Moberly writes in his book 'Prophecy and Discernment': 'God's sovereignty is not exercised arbitrarily, but responsibly and responsively, taking into account the moral, or immoral, actions of human beings.'

Seek him and live. This remains as true today as it was for the Israelites then, and it is in Jesus himself that we find life rather than death. As a warning, this passage is an act of love rather than an expression of arbitrary vengeance. It reflects our God – a covenant God, a God of love. Our Lord found in his short 30 years' time there was still exploitation of the poor and lavish extortion in the worship practices in Jerusalem, which he tackled in words and actions. His sermon on the Mount praised and blessed those who sought to put others first and carry compassion and mercy to our world. So the message of Amos is as relevant today as it was then.

Finally.

Our world is a different one in so many ways. Social mobility, artificial intelligence, pigs hearts transplanted into humans, and covid. But so many elements of Amos's world do not change. Our levelling up still has to be achieved and our care for the struggling world and war torn destitution has not changed. Our part in all this may seem minimal, but our faith is constant. Our trust in God is as faithful as then. Our hope in Christ is unfailing and assured. Our hope of heaven hereby, as the hymn puts it.

The message for today is for the 'global church'. Where God has brought material blessing to his people through honest hard work and diligence, such blessing should be received gratefully and celebrated. Today's needs of poverty, lack of clean water, malnutrition, sparse medical care, show up material advantage granted to us - affluent believers. Our task is to help those parts of the world where help is urgently needed. Or tragically repeat the mistakes of the people in Amos's day who neglected the poor among them. Such neglect deserves, and will receive, God's judgment.

The church must never presume upon God's favour. His justice is universal. He will deal in perfect justice with those who claim his love and compassion but fail to extend that love and compassion to others. We have been shown mercy, so we as the church universal must love our neighbours, both near and far with the self-giving love shown to us by Christ. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us" (Eph. 5:1-2).

May we stay faithful in His service, and committed to praying for our world and all those able to heal and restore, right the wrongs and speak truth to power.

For His Name's sake. AMEN.

Fr Ed Elsey OSJ February 2022

Three Articles for Meditation

1. ACHIEVEMENT AND HAPPINESS IN A SMILE

+David, OSJ (Wales)

I was relaxing at home reading a book one early evening. Our doorbell rang. I rose to answer it, wondering who on earth could have braved such a stormy and wet night to call on either Anne or myself.

When I opened the front door, there was a neighbourly ten year old boy, with the rain streaming down his face, his coat absolutely soaked poor lad, and his feet in a puddle.

But did he mind?

Not a jot, his eyes were shining with excitement. "Come in!" I said, and while I helped him off with his dripping coat, and Anne found a suitable drying place for it, I discovered the reason for his visit.

He simply wanted to show myself and Anne his school report paper! Carefully removing it from his pocket, he gave it to me and waited, his face aglow, while I settled down to read it. I handed the report to Anne and his little face was as bright as the sun with a very broad grin. I admit, I too could not hide my pride for him.

What pleased me every bit as much as the marks themselves - or maybe even more - was the fact that a good report meant so much to him, and that he'd been so proud of it that, after showing it to his parents, he'd run smiling through the rain to let me have a look at it, too.

What a wonderful achievement for a young lad, but also that he felt so proud to show both Anne and myself. I felt very humbled at this boy's action. May the Lord richly bless him in his continuing studies.

2. A QUOTE.

“There are two kinds of really great people in the world - those who can give thoroughly sound advice, and those who can take it. And, of the two, I am not sure but that the latter are greater than the former.

3. A QUESTION ABOUT HUMAN BEINGS?

A young lad heard someone use the expression “human beings” and asked what it meant.

“It means all of us,” he was told. “Father, mother, brother, sister our neighbours. Everyone we know is a human being.”

“But, all the people we don’t know - are they human beings too?” He asked.

How easy is it sometimes to think only of those within our immediate circle! It might not be a bad idea as we read our newspapers today or watch the news on television, in which there will be much about so many people we do not know, just to try and think of a few of them at least, not just as items of news, but as human beings, as persons deserving our concern. What a wise question from such a young person.

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TELL ME WHAT IS BEAUTY?

+David, OSJ (Wales)

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious.” 1 Peter 2:7.

I must confess at the start this is a story and not a sermon.

It is the story of an Englishboy whose name was Jon - not JOHN but JON. His real name was in fact Jolyon.

That was a family name. It had been the name of his father and of his grandfather and of his brother who had died before he was born. His father had been called Jo and his brother Jolly and his grandfather Jolyon and he was called Jon, so that he might be himself. His full name was Jolyon Forsyte, a very odd name, but then Jon was a very odd boy.

Jon was terribly fond of his father and mother, especially his mother whom his father called Irene. He thought she was the most beautiful person he had ever seen or ever would see. He was only eight years old but was a great reader and because he liked the stories of the Round Table he called his mother Guinevere.

He never tired of being with her and watching her. Once he said that she was the “refindest looking person in all the world”.

That was why he missed her so when she and his father were at the seaside. He thought she would never come home and when she did they had a long quiet visit together in his own room. She knelt down in front of him on the window seat.

“Have you missed us much, Jon?” she said and Jon nodded and kept on nodding his head.

“What did you see?” he asked.

“Nothing but beauty,” said his mother.

“What exactly is beauty?” he asked and his mother laughed and said that was a ‘poser’.

She meant that it was one of those hard questions which little children ask just to puzzle their mothers.

“Can I see it?” said Jon.

His mother got up and sat beside him and said, “You do every day. The sky is beautiful, the stars and moonlight nights, and then the birds, the flowers, the trees – they’re all beautiful. Look out of the window, there’s beauty for you.”

“Oh,” said Jon, opening his eyes, “that’s the view. Is that all?”

“All?” No, the sea is beautiful, wonderfully beautiful, and the waves with their foam flying back.”

John standing beside his mother, put his arms around her neck and said, as if he had made a discovery, “I know. You are IT, really, and all the rest is make believe.”

You can guess how his mother felt but all she could say was: “Oh, Jon!”

I think that story does not need any sermon. A boy who thinks his mother is beauty and all else is make believe has found the best gift life has for him and has given his mother the best that life can give her. I imagine that is the way Jesus felt about His mother. What a beautiful mother He had.

The great painters of all the ages have tried to paint her portrait, and if you go among the hundreds and hundreds of paintings in the galleries of Dresden, you will find a room where Raphael’s portrait of Mary has a room all to itself and there no one speaks or talks, but each one lets beauty speak to his or herself.

I hope that is the way you feel about your mother. You see it is love that makes beauty.

When we love deeply and truly, then our eyes see beauty; the sky is bluer, the grass is greener, the stars are clearer, and those we love are glorified.

Perhaps you will remember little Jon's definition of beauty.

He was looking into his mother's face, who was trying to tell him what beauty is, when he said: "I know what it is. You are it, really, and all the rest is make believe."

What a wonderful compliment!

WALKING IN A NEW WAY

+David, OSJ (Wales)

"Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.... they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)

In my daily journey, Lord God, give me faith to sustain me.

In my daily duties, give me for my rest, your peace.

In my times of fear, grant me courage.

Facing temptation, arm me with your strength.

Fearing I may surrender, equip me with your Spirit, that I may overcome.

If I should fall to seduction, to sickness, or to the evil one, raise me up, I pray.

When I sin, strip me down to naked repentance,

Scour me to sorrow for my ways,

Wash me clean of my guilt,

Clothe me in the royal robes of your grace,

My Father and My King.

Lift up my head, to look upon your face.

Lift my feet to walk in a new Way. Amen

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Holy Scripture on 'Gossip!'

1. [Proverbs 11:13](#)

A **gossip** betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.

2. [Proverbs 16:28](#)

A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a **gossip** separates close friends.

3. [Proverbs 18:8](#)

The words of a **gossip** are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

4. [Proverbs 20:19](#)

A **gossip** betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.

5. [Proverbs 26:20](#)

Without wood a fire goes out; without a **gossip** a quarrel dies down.

6. [Proverbs 26:22](#)

The words of a **gossip** are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.

7. [Romans 1:29](#)

They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are **gossips**,

8. [2 Corinthians 12:20](#)

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, **gossip**, arrogance and disorder.

Sin, evil, God and us.

+Ian, OSJ (UK)

You may not have realised that there is a difference between sin and evil and it is quite important to at least be aware of the difference. They are related but not the same.

Sin is when we either do something against God, our neighbour or even ourselves which outcome drives a wedge between us or troubles our conscience. It is usually caused by nothing more than selfishness, the desire to put our own needs above the needs of others for our own benefit, pleasure, personal influence and gain. It's a plain mis-use of God's gift to us of free will.

Sin breaks both Great Commandments, to love God first and foremost, and to love our neighbours as we ourselves would like to be loved. Sin inevitably hurts other people as well as ourselves. Sin spoils, even destroys relationships.

Sin likes to get its own way, justify its own actions and make excuses or blames others when things go wrong or is caught out.

It is like an addiction that keeps pulling us back to do things we know deep down are wrong, and if we are not careful sin can spiral out of control. That's why we have consciences to guide us and why there are rules in the bible and in society to govern, guide and moderate our behaviour.

Whilst these apply some control to our addiction to sin, they do not cure it.

If sin becomes embedded in our lives and rules unchecked, it can separate us from people and even from God. All sins can be forgiven providing we want them to be and acknowledge our fault, but if we refuse to seek forgiveness then we are in deep trouble.

Even God cannot help us in those circumstances.

It seems to me that where sin takes us once committed is often more of a problem than the sin itself. And sin left unchecked is nothing less than an invitation for evil to take root.

Evil is something external which influences our decision making process and works against God regardless of the cost to those involved and beyond. It takes no note of the 'collateral damage' it causes, only that it works against God's will and anything that can be described as 'good'. It is 'anti-God'.

Evil wants to defeat both God and 'good' finally and totally.

In terms of our Christian lives, evil wants to separate us from God and to take us away from God's love and forgiveness. It wants us to believe we are irredeemable and there is nothing that can save us, not even God. Evil is based on a great lie. Nevertheless, once it enters our lives, it exerts great power over our thinking and our actions, and is unbelievably destructive once it is established.

Evil exists internally and externally, within us and beyond and around us.

Most people have difficulty believing evil is a 'force' or 'entity' that exists in its own right, but the bible make it clear it does. Evil is real and is no joke.

Part of the problem is the way 'evil' is often personified, the stuff of fairy tales and entertainment films. These place a level of disbelief into our rational minds which masks the reality. Evil does not want us to believe in it and will even subject itself to ridicule so no one takes its threat or power seriously.

Evil comes in many guises and often pretends it is something else other than what it is. It may even claim that it is God or greater than God but in the end it cannot hide behind its own lies, deceits and deceptions. It always reveals itself by its actions in the end.

Evil entraps us through sin and is a spiritual cancer with one outcome in mind.

It gives us the excuses we need to keep on sinning (doing what we know deep down inside is wrong) and justifies our actions no matter what damage it does.

Evil is the opposite of good.

To get some idea of what evil is really like, imagine everything we consider as being 'good' and then reverse it.

Love becomes hatred, truth becomes lies, trust becomes deceit, wisdom becomes stupidity and ignorance, sufficiency becomes hunger, peace becomes terror and conflict, healing becomes hurting, creation becomes destruction, life becomes death, care becomes abuse, charity becomes greed, rule becomes oppression, fairness and justice become unfairness and injustice, etc., etc.

Evil and good are diametrically opposed, complete opposites when it comes to it. They are also totally incompatible.

Evil rarely presents itself fully but instead tries to present itself as something else. It often presents itself initially as 'good', 'normal', 'reasonable', 'acceptable', and as we are slowly drawn further into it, it gradually takes us further from the real truth. By the time we realize what it really is, it is often too late to stand against it.

It certainly gives some explanation as to how easily the German people 'allowed' someone like Hitler to come to power and became part of the subsequent and indescribable crimes against humanity, a story still being repeated in many countries in the world even today.

Evil still exists and it is very much a reality we have to constantly deal with.

Small things matter.

Let's look at the Fall in Genesis and see how one sin seems to lead to another:

God's word is questioned

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

The re-affirmation of God's word - we know what God said....

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"^{*}

(* Genesis 2 v¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.")

God's Word is contradicted and challenged

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.

The false reward for sin

⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The succumbing to temptation

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

Drawing others into temptation

She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

The self-recognition of sin

⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked;

Trying to hide sin

so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Sin and disobedience – the great cover up revealed

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

Blaming others

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

None of the steps in the fall of mankind were great, rather exceptionally small in themselves in the great scheme of things, but it was the combined effect of all the steps. Read the rest of the chapter if you want to know the outcome.

The story of the fall raises a number of questions.

Is the serpent representative of sin or evil or both, and in what way?

Is the questioning of God's word the results of sin or evil, or a genuine desire to fully understand it?

Is contradiction of God's word a matter of sin or evil?

Are any of us so secure in our faith and belief that we can't be tempted away from God's path by our own desires and hopes? Can we trust ourselves?

Is a desire to want to aspire to being more God-like justifiable or is a usurpation of the authority of God?

When we fall into temptations path, why do we find it necessary to involve others and draw them into the same sin?

Why do we find it necessary to blame others when the fault is clearly ours and ours alone? Whatever happened to 'the buck stops here'?

Why does it have to be someone else's fault when we are clearly in the wrong?

These few questions just are the tip of the iceberg!

What is clear is that our acts have consequences. If we really knew what the consequences were going to be, would we have done what we have done?

I wonder what the outcome would have been if there had been a lot more honesty?

You might take the time to look at each step in the story and decide for yourself how the outcome might have been different if only responsibility had been accepted.

Regardless of this, the one thing that is certain is that when sin comes into the equation it has a massive impact, seemingly the consequences far in excess of the sin itself.

However that is the nature of sin itself. It's like throwing a stone into a mill pond, the ripples travel far and beyond our expectation, and they usually affect not just ourselves but those we love and for generations beyond our own.

Eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil did make a monumental difference. Before this incident there was an innocence in our being because we did not understand what good and evil was and like a small child we could not be condemned for what we did not know or understand, but once we understood what good and evil was and the difference between them, our innocence was lost. We effectively condemned ourselves to death.

We simply are unable to deal with the inevitability of the consequences of sin and are eternally destined to be always susceptible to its influence.

Essentially, unrepentant sin leads to death because God and sin are incompatible. Outside of God, death is inevitable because God is the reason for life itself, and sin separates people from God and therefore life in all its eternal goodness.

Remember God and sin are diametrically opposed.

Jesus

We have all heard that 'Jesus died to save us from our sins and bring eternal life to those who accepted him'. Well known words but not well understood.

Put more simply, Jesus restored our relationship with God and showed that sin and evil have no power over us, but it's up to us to decide the next step.

It only works if we really believe it and have faith (trust) that this is actually a true and a real statement of fact, and then act upon it.

Otherwise the story of Jesus, a well-meaning but possibly deluded religious person with a death wish who could spin a good yarn and pull off some great stunts, remains at best a theoretical theological contrivance to persuade us to go to church and hand over our hard earned cash on the largely unproven promise of eternal life.

Whilst some may subscribe to this particular cynical view, I do not. I don't believe for one minute any of us are that gullible or stupid.

God loves us so much that even in our great need He still leaves the door open for us, even though we have made an absolute mess up of things. God loves us more than we know and Jesus remains an integral part of that infinite and eternal love story between us and God. Jesus did what we ourselves could not do, and that was deal with the consequences of sin.

Sin still remains a troublesome obstacle in our daily lives, but there is forgiveness from God for our mistakes providing we are open, up front and honest with God, and to do our bit in putting things right/making amends. It's not just a case of saying 'sorry' and that's it – it often needs to be evidenced by action (remorse, reparation, reconciliation, renunciation of sin, etc.)

Our desire for reconciliation with God and that inner need to restore our relationship with God seems to carry more weight than the sins we have committed that would separate us from God.

Evil would convince us there is no hope once sin has become established in our lives but this just another one of evil's deceptions and untruths. The same is true of having committed an 'unforgivable' sin and how guilt and our sense of unworthiness or being unlovable or irredeemable can be used by evil to keep us away from God, and it is always looking for new ways of driving us apart.

Evil knows just how deeply it hurts both God and us when we find ourselves separated from God's presence. God truly grieves at our absence.

We are only lost if we believe that to be so. The reality is there always remains hope. No one is irredeemable. God does not want to lose a single person but the choice is theirs to make.

Summary

So to bring my discourse to a simple conclusion, I offer you this:

1. sin is a natural and internal consequence of our flawed human nature
2. sin is forgivable if we are truly repentant
3. evil and sin are different
4. evil is an external force that encourages us to sin and separate ourselves from God
5. evil's final goal is to separate mankind from God through lies, deceit and other means, and to bring about mankind's complete and total downfall in its rejection of God
6. death, suffering and destruction is ultimate goal of evil
7. evil is a real force which has power, cause and effect, is beyond our comprehension and is not something to be treated lightly
8. but ultimately, evil has already been defeated thanks to Jesus's resurrection, and that spiritual death, the consequence of sin, is no longer an inevitability for those who genuinely love God and seek Him out.
9. we need to keep telling ourselves that simple fact. Evil has no power over us, and neither does sin, unless we want it to have power over us.

Put plainly, the ball is on our court and the choice is ours.

Galatians 5 v 13-26

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Colossians 3 v 1-14

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸ But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Romans 1 v 18-32: God's wrath against sinful humanity

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; ³¹ they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. ³² Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

A LIFE LOST IN CONFLICT

+David, OSJ (Wales)

I heard a most wonderful story recently of a couple who lost their only son in a notable recent conflict. He was killed when only in his twenties. Soon after his death, they decided, in memory of him, to hold an 'At Home' every Wednesday evening. It began by entertaining his young friends.

Then, as the years went by, the idea grew to inviting friends of friends, and then to the lonely and elderly in the district. Once someone came, they could come again the following Wednesday. All they do is talk and enjoy a cup of coffee and some companionship - but it is a meeting looked forward to by all who share in it.

Instead of dwelling on the darkness of life and being bitter about their loss, this couple have turned their sorrow into a positive action for good. Every Wednesday they are spreading light and cheer - what a warm and a wonderful tribute to their son.

FRENCH REVOLUTION AND A BABY

Here is an interesting story to tell. During the French Revolution, Madame de Custine, an aristocratic lady, was seen on the stair leaving the Courts of Justice in Paris, and at once a savage cry arose from the mob who pressed forward as if to lynch her on the spot. Uncertain whether to advance or retreat, she hesitated momentarily, and the people were just about to spring forward to seize her when an unknown woman in the crowd secretly pressed her hand.

The woman was carrying a child in her arms, and now she gave it to Madame de Custine with the words - "Return him to me at the bottom of the stair."
Protected by having a child with her, Madame de Custine was able to escape unhurt.

She gave the baby back to its mother and never knew her deliverer's name.
But, from those dark days of the French Revolution, this is one incident that shines out.

"GOD IS LOVE"

Here is another interesting human story. High on the rocks dominating the entrance to Tobermory Bay in the Isle of Mull is written in large white letters - "God is Love."

Many visitors approaching Tobermory by sea are intrigued by it.

The story is that, many years ago, a father took his little boy for a walk along the cliffs and had the horror of seeing the youngster fall to the shore below.

Rushing down, he was overjoyed to find that the child had survived the fall. To express his gratitude, he painted "God is Love" on the rocks and, although he died some time ago, I believe that sign is still to this day kept fresh and maintained by local people.

TWO FACES

Another interesting event! Two contrasting characters appeared in a pulpit not very long ago. For the children's address, the priest picked up from the pulpit floor a rag doll. He called it Smiling Sammy - and what a cheerful smile it had.

The boys and girls in the congregation were assured that Sammy would do anything for anybody, and was very merry and friendly. "But," the priest went on, "I have someone else here."

Down he bent, and brought up Frowning Freddie whose face was cross and whose mouth turned down contemptuously. "I'm afraid," the priest went on, "Freddie is touchy and bad tempered and not very friendly." Then he asked the boys and girls which character they liked best. All, of course, voted for Smiling Sammy.

Only then did the priest explain that when he had bent down to pick up Frowning Freddie, all he had done was turn Smiling Sammy round - because the two faces were really one doll, a good one and a bad person in one.

I can see what he was getting at - can't you? An excellent description for another sermon!

A MATCH!

Mrs Gordon, felt it cold in her living room, God bless her, and decided to put on the fire. She bent down - and a moment later she was sitting in her chair, her face in her hands, weeping. Why? Because she's found herself trying to light her electric fire with a match!

She wept again as she told her neighbour about it, for she knew that match marked the end of all that meant so much to her. She realised then she could no longer go on living alone, that she'd have to give up her independence and the house she so loved, with all its memories and the things she treasured, and go into a home.

So, within a month, Mrs Gordon was in a home where she now doesn't have to worry, where she is looked after with care and kindness, where she has people around her. But, oh, what she'd give to stay in her own small house. It is so sad when someone is unaware they are suffering from Alzheimer's, yet try going on until they cannot continue any more without assistance.

A burnt match lying in the hearth beside the electric fire. Hardly worth a second glance. Yet, for one old lady, it becomes almost the end of the world. Bless her, and may she now know comfort, support, love and kindness.

KINDNESS - KENNETH MORE (ACTOR)

Technicians in the entertainment industry can be pretty cynical and hard bitten, but even amongst them there's general agreement that you'd have to go a long way to find a man as nice as actor Kenneth More. One of the cameramen who was filming the "Father Brown" television series explained about the day a teenage boy who was playing a very small part was looking a bit down in the dumps.

It didn't take Kenneth More long to find out what was wrong. The boy had been told that his fashionably long hair would have to be cut for the part.

Kenneth More had a quick word with the director, pointing out that the boy would be wearing a cap anyway and his hair could just as well be tucked up inside it - so all was well.

Not a very important matter, perhaps - but it meant a lot to one unknown actor. Who knows - perhaps he, too, will be a star one day. If he is, I'm sure he'll remember Kenneth's kindness and show a similar concern for young hopefuls on the bottom rung of the ladder.

Prayerfully yours with all blessings,

+David

-oOo-

Comment - Prince Andrew

Many people have criticised Prince Andrew for settling out of court over the allegations regarding his conduct. The questions about his alleged guilt is not something I wish to comment on but simply to note that he has followed the advice given in Matthew 5 v 25, words given to us by Jesus himself.

²⁵ "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."

Perhaps he might also give some thought to his relationship with God, and if there is the need, settle with him before it is too late. Something we all should give due consideration and thought to if we haven't already.

Emergency Measures, OSJ (UK):

It has been decided that given the protracted situation we find ourselves in currently that two new temporary measures have been implemented for all members of OSJ (UK), whether in the Ministry Team or the Ministry Support Team.

Any member of OSJ (UK) may self-administer communion using the form suggested, and that includes to their families and all who are in need if they cannot receive communion from a priest or Eucharistic Minister through unavailability.

The same applies to the giving of last rites (viaticum).

Suggested forms of approved service are available (with instructions) to download from our website downloads page:

1. Self-administered Communion
2. Last Rites (Emergency Measures)

Also to be noted, regular services at St Leonard's have been temporarily suspended until further notice.

This is particularly regretted.

+Ian, Executive Bishop, OSJ (UK)



**St Leonard's Chapel,
Hazlewood Castle,
Yorkshire,
LS24 9NJ**



OSJ (UK) Services, 2022.

Unless otherwise stated:

Services usually take place on the FIRST and THIRD Sundays of each month at 6.00 p.m.

Services take the form of a short and very gentle communion service, lasting 20-30 minutes.

Covid-19 precautions: **St Leonard's will remain closed until restrictions are fully lifted.**

2nd January, 2022	16th January, 2022
6th February, 2022	20th February, 2022
6th March, 2022	20th March, 2022
3rd April, 2022	17th April, 2022
1st May, 2022	15th May, 2022
5th June, 2022	19th June, 2022
3rd July, 2022	17th July, 2022
7th August, 2022	21st August, 2022
4th September, 2022	18th September, 2022
2nd October, 2022	16th October, 2022
6th November, 2022	20th November, 2022
4th December, 2022	18th December, 2022

We use a non-alcoholic communion wine so children may take part.

There is no requirement to be baptised or confirmed, only to treat with due respect.

All are very welcome and all may receive regardless of tradition or denominational background.

Additional Services:

Remembrance Sunday: 7th November 10.35 a.m.

Midnight Mass: 24th December 11.20 p.m.