

4. Week Beginning 28th September 2014 Sin is Blind to Beauty

In Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* the character Shug reminds us how fed-up God must be when we walk through a field of poppies and fail to notice the colour purple. Rabbi Lionel Blue refers to an admonition in the Talmud. On the final Judgement day we shall be called to account for all the beautiful things we should have enjoyed – and didn't. Patrick Kavanagh, one of Ireland's finest poets, explains why a parish priest worried about the spirituality of his new curate. The younger man was never full of wonder or reverence when the sun opened a flower. Sin is blind to beauty. It is grey and has no imagination. Sin shrinks before surprise and excitement. It sees no magic in creation. The vibrant presence of the Holy Spirit in all things is denied. Cynicism replaces trust. Sin lives in a flat world and fears the edges. Like a depressed soul, it does not notice colour.

Sin is more than lots of sins. It is not a 'one-off' mistake in an otherwise perfect life, a clearly defined stain on a white surface. It is more like a way of being that we follow, an attitude of refusal to the invitation to wholeness and holiness. Sin is a draining thing. It has no growing in it. It is ugly because it is graceless. It cannot bless or rejoice or be passionate. Nor does it want to see very far. Shades of this negative state are alive and well in all of us. To believe anything else would be mad beyond measure.

Sin is the choice to live in illusion, to avoid the truth of existence, of light, of one's dark side. Many people experience sin as being trapped, tempted to despair, being held captive. Others speak of sin in terms of fear, fear of self, of others, of taking risks, of speaking out. Such sin is the refusal to trust that God is good and that therefore we are good too. This results in a life of excessive control, of clinging to the ego-self, of grasping for more, of trying to prove that we are worthy because we cannot trust in unconditional love. Sin is giving in to self-hate and to the insecurity that results in a life focussed on self-protection at the expense of others.

When I think of sin I think of fear – the fear of beauty, of pleasure, of change and of being open. Closed-ness must be the sin against the Holy Spirit. Deep-seated insecurity keeps the shutters tight. There is no light where there is no trust. Many of us were brought up in a climate of fear where to be different was to be avoided. We lived in a two-tiered world where only the top tier mattered. Lie low here and fly high in heaven. Steer clear of all risk in this life so as to enjoy the no-risk existence to follow. There is something sinful about this blind attitude towards the divine invitation to live life to the full, in the here and now. In scriptural terms sin is seen as 'missing the mark'. It misses the miracle. There is no mystery in the life of sin. In his famous *Original Blessing*, Matthew Fox writes, 'By sinning in this way we refuse to fall in love with life, to love what is loveable, to befriend and savour life's simple and non-elitist pleasures, to celebrate the blessings of life, to return thanks for such blessings by still more blessing.'

For centuries, there has been a major element in our Roman Catholic belief system that sees the Church as in conflict with the world, as a beacon of truth in a tunnel of lies, as a recipe for life in a culture of death, as a ship of saints in a sea of fools. But grace, as we have seen, is not like that. *Treasured and Transformed* is dedicated to renewing the original meaning and vision of grace for all God's people, for the victimised and abused parts of all of us, because it makes a heaven or a hell of a difference whether the church in which we find ourselves points to humanity as a sin to be atoned for, or a blessing to be celebrated.

(*Treasured and Transformed* pp 178,179)