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Perfume Sermon Series – 4

“My Sin”

Christmas pageants can often yield very humorous moments. A faithful and holy priest, Arnold Hearn, once presided over a pageant when he was a young priest. **“Just as the wise men were presenting the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, the reverent hush was modified by a stifled laugh. The mother who had provided the perfume bottle to represent the myrrh had suddenly remembered that its label said, ‘Foolish Virgin!’”**

The perfume most asked about when I was writing the Perfume Series Sermons was **‘My Sin.’** It’s interesting that the French perfume company **Gabilla** that is responsible for the **‘Foolish Virgin’** perfume is also the maker of **‘My Sin’** and **‘My Sinful Soul!’** Henriette Gabilla, the owner of the fragrance house was the first female perfumer in the history of perfumery. **A Syrian by birth, she went to Paris in the early 1900’s. Her company made an incredible number of perfumes and many had rather benign names: Fleur du Jour (Flower of the Day), Cordiality, Jasmine, Muguet (Lily of the Valley), Mimosa. But, then there were these others: My Sin, Foolish Virgin, My Sinful Soul, Folle Passion, Tango, Dream for Two, and the *pièce de résistance* was named L’Intrigant (The Intrigue!) Ah, yes, the intrigue of it all – tango, passion, foolish virgin, sinful soul, ‘My Sin.’**

A classical definition of sin is ‘separation from God.’ Yet, that’s not what immediately comes to mind when we think of sin. We think of the big stuff, the things that are ‘against the rules’ – things like lying, cheating or stealing, lust and lasciviousness, adultery, murder – you know, the ‘Big 10!’ (Ten Commandments)

Such acts can be destructive to say the least, but perhaps, our focus should not be so **heavy on congratulating ourselves as long as we’re not breaking any of the ‘big 10.’** It might be good to look a little deeper at sin – maybe even re-define it a bit. Of course, **there’s some mystique and clandestine appeal to the Big `10’ – that’s why so many people are interested in a perfume sermon on “My Sin!”** The thought of sin draws us in and makes us want to know more. **It’s** rather like the excitement we feel when we hear

some scandal that involves an important person. **It's** what makes the Tabloids so **profitable. We want to know more about people's sins!**

Ironically, even though sin is naturally thought of in terms of moral lapses, offenses against God, terrible misdeeds – sin is also allied to the word **'sincere'** which comes from the Latin **'sin-ceritatum'** meaning **'sound, pure, whole.'** Maybe sin, as we have historically understood it, needs to be brought out of the dark closet of guilt and shame and seen as that which keeps us from health and wholeness.

If we can set aside **the 'big 10' for a minute**, we might begin to see the connection **between 'sin-ceritatum'** and sin. Consider a common everyday occurrence. We say something to someone that we think they want to hear even though we may be thinking or feeling something completely different. We may hope to get a particular response from the other person, and we know that if we say what we **really feel, that's probably** not the response we will get. Or, just the opposite – we want to avoid a particular response that we know we **will** get if we speak truthfully, so we say what is insincere in order to prevent conflict. It can probably safely be said that we do this in our closest relationships quite frequently.

One young man, for example, while he was dating his future wife, said he loved hiking, because he knew that she loved to hike. Yet, he hated hiking! After they were married, and his wife wanted to go hiking, she was distressed to find that the man she had **married did not like hiking after all! Now, at face value, there's no real sin taking place there. The man's actions** might have bordered on lying, but he committed no real moral lapses or heinous crime – no serious **offense against the 'big 10.'** **But, there was** a lack of sincerity – **'sin-ceritatum.'** **Over time, an absence of 'sin-ceritatum' in our daily lives** magnifies our lack of health and wholeness and we begin to find ourselves detached/separated from the truth of our own selves, from the warmth of those we care about, from the One who created us in love.

So, **what about "My Sin?"** We would do well to do some thinking about **'My Sin'** – watching and being aware of our words and thoughts and actions – and that means exercising internal mindfulness. Internal mindfulness is important because we often see sin where there is no sin, **and we are often blind to sin when it's** staring us right in the face. **We're so habituated to connecting sin only with the 'big 10,' that we miss all the** small things that keep us from wholeness.

The traditional Christian practice of self-examination has always included questions about what sins we have committed – what we have done wrong during a day. It might **be more useful to back into 'My Sin'** another way. We might look at our lives and ask, **"Do I feel any inner uneasiness or chaos? Do I feel as close to God** at 3 pm on Tuesday

afternoon as I do in church at 9:30 on Sunday morning? Are there places in me that **don't feel whole? Where do I feel detached from God?**"

When we begin to look at these things, we begin to become more aware of what is not **'right' inside** of us, where there is distortion, or a lack of wholeness. If we look a little deeper still, we are likely to uncover some behaviors; ways of thinking, speaking, or being that keep us tied up in knots, **far from our true nature, and far from God. That's when we begin to see "My Sin."** The focus is not so much on what rules we have broken, but what is keeping us from wholeness.

Although it may not be conscious, we are doing this all the time. We know when we are or are not making healthy choices. Here are **some simple examples: We can't curb our tongue** because we just want to tell someone something **we've heard about someone else. Yet, it doesn't feel good inside even while we're speaking. Or, we make a snide remark about someone behind their back. We know it's not going to increase our wholeness, but we just can't seem to stop ourselves. Or, we can't resist making a sarcastic remark to our spouse in the sweetest tone imaginable, but we know sweetness is not our motivation. Or, we demean someone who lacks education, standing, or income. We know we're judging someone unfairly. Or, we choose to continue a behavior we know isn't good for us because we're stubborn and want to prove we have power over our own lives. Inside, we know we're being obnoxious. Or, we manipulate people or events to go our way even if it means others don't get their full share. We know we're being selfish.**

*My sin, it seems so natural to me,
I'm only living my life
Thinking I want to be free.*

*My sin, it nearly tears me apart,
Keeps me from knowing God,
Distorts the shape of my heart.*

*But, when I find desire for peace
Is growing in the center of my soul,
Then, I long for what will heal me,
And, I turn to God to make me whole.*

*My sin can never keep me from God,
Nor really sully my soul,
God's mercy makes me whole.*

We really don't need a sermon on 'My Sin,' because we all know when we choose what is less than whole. What we need is to learn how to return to wholeness, and that is not so very difficult. We simply start by paying closer attention to our lives and noting where

they are distorted. If we can do **just that**, we may have the courage to look at what needs to be changed in our lives. Then we may gather more courage to make a change. We may dare to choose the peace that comes from knowing God. Rather than feeling guilty or ashamed, we might become enlightened. In other words, we can make choices that bring us health. We can move toward **repentance** and **amendment of life**.

Those are two 'churchy' words that seem ancient and out of touch with modern culture. Yet **repentance** is simply the recognition of our lack of wholeness and feeling a desire **to make a mental or spiritual 'attitude' change, and amendment of life** comes from the word *'mend'* and means to repair health. So, repentance and amendment of life mean having an attitude change so we can **regain our health! Wow, that's a lighter, freer, more helpful way to think about 'My Sin!'**

The Pharisees and scribes in Scripture were offended because Jesus hung out with sinners. They had that slimmer sense of sin as moral misdeeds. They had detached themselves from those whom they believed were moral degenerates. They saw sin as separation, and they thought they were being holy by separating themselves from **anyone involved in the 'big 10.'** Surprisingly, their focus on separation was right, but misplaced. If they had looked within, rather than without and if they had paid more **attention to the relation between 'sin' and 'sin-ceritatum' in their own lives, they might have better understood Jesus' proclamation that there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**

Henriette Gabilla's perfume company may have been on to something. When she designed fragrances that named with braggadocio the intrigue of it all – tango, passion, foolish virgin, sinful soul, My Sin. – she brought things out of the darkness in an era when such things were still unspoken in public. I have a hunch that the women who **wore 'My Sin' may have paid more attention to their inner lives as a result.** I also think Jesus would have hung out with those women. There were **other women who didn't** wear it, no doubt, who lifted their spiritual noses in the air, shunning those who seemed **to have no shame in wearing a perfume by the name of 'My Sin.'** I believe that Jesus would have remarked to those women, **"There's joy in heaven over one sinner who repents."**

In any case, **I think I'd better start looking for a bottle of 'My Sin!'**

Amen.

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