

“My Bad”

Sundays after Pentecost

Ezekiel 33:7-11

September 4, 2011

“My bad” has become popular. It is slang for saying “My mistake - I'm to blame.” 'My bad' became, according to Wikipedia, in 1995 when the movie “Clueless” came out. This starred Alicia Silverstone and contains what seems to have been the first use of the phrase in the mainstream media. The movie has a scene with Alicia Silverstone's character learning to drive: “Cher swerves - to avoid killing a person on a bicycle. Cher: Whoops, my bad.” Since then it has woven itself into the language of pop culture.

Although a street term, it is virtually synonymous with the earlier Latin phrase, 'mea culpa'.

“Mea Culpa”, a Latin phrase, means, “I'm to blame.” The literal translation is 'through my own fault'. Even those who don't speak Latin could probably make a guess that this phrase means 'I am culpable', or words to that effect. In other words, “my bad.”

In the lesson from Ezekiel 33:7-11, it addresses the crippling despair that can occur when we face our sin squarely and accept responsibility for the harm we have caused. ☞When we face in an honest way our choices, when we confess “mea culpa”, “my bad.”☞

Standing between the announcements of judgment in Ezekiel 1-32 and restoration by God in chapters 34-48, Ezekiel 33 gives a rare moment of human choice. Ezekiel learns from a fugitive from Jerusalem that the city of Jerusalem has fallen. But this is not the end of Ezekiel's ministry, or the end of God's work with the exiles. Ezekiel's call to be a sentinel (A lookout) is a call to warn Israel to repent and live. ☞☞

This role was derived from the practice of warfare, when it was the custom for cities to appoint lookouts to sound the alarm in the event of an invasion. Even though, or perhaps because, Jerusalem has already been destroyed, the moral danger has not yet passed for the exiles. Accordingly, God continues to hold Ezekiel accountable for the lives of even the sinners in his community. If Ezekiel does not warn them and they die in their guilt, God will hold him personally responsible for their deaths. ☞☞

At this point, however, the problem is no longer convincing the exiles of their guilt, but of persuading them that it is not the last word. God reports that the exiles are in utter despair: ***“Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?”*** The saying is reminiscent of confessions of sin in Psalm 51. It expresses a similar sense of abject and total guilt:

For I know my transgressions,☞ and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence☞and blameless when you pass judgment.

The difference in Ezekiel, however, is that there is not an appeal to God for mercy. In light of the destruction of Jerusalem, the exiles despair of life. ***“How can we live?”☞☞***

Ezekiel answers this despair by declaring God's word: "**Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?**"

Ezekiel suggests that their awareness of their guilt should lead to repentance and life, not despair. God takes pleasure in repentance not punishment, and it is up to Ezekiel's audience to decide: "**Why will you die, O House of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God, Turn, then, and live!**"

Ezekiel insists that their guilt should lead to repentance and life, not despair. The verb for repentance (turn, return) appears rarely in Ezekiel, but it does appear here; in fact, Ezekiel doubles the call to repentance. **Turn back, Turn back** ... Here, as elsewhere in the Bible, repentance calls, quite literally, for turning away from a present course of action and turning or returning toward a new way, the way of obedience to God. This same Word from God speaks to us today.

I had asked in the beginning of worship "Have you changed?" The reason behind the question is to ask you have you ever faced your sins honestly? Have you faced your choices that have caused hurt or anguish? Have you come face to face with whom you are and not whom you think you are? Not an easy thing to do. I know it isn't easy for me. I suspect it is equally as difficult for you.

Repentance, or turning, is inherently hopeful. It is hopeful because it assumes that it is possible to change course, even after a long life of sin. Ezekiel seems to say that human beings are not slaves of past choices, or held captive to despair; but we are free to choose another way. As if to underscore that point, Ezekiel restates that God does not desire the death of anyone, not even the wicked. What God does take pleasure in is repentance that leads to life: "**turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?**"

Is repentance possible? Are we really capable of changing, really changing?

If we take the Biblical story seriously then the answer is a qualified yes! Just a few chapters later, we will see a valley filled with the dry bones of the whole house of Israel. No longer asking, "**how can we live?**" these dry bones now say, "**We are clean cut off.**" No one has yet turned, the way of death has prevailed, and it will be up to the spirit of God to bring Israel back to life. And yet God asks Israel (and asks us) to turn and live. How is that possible?

It is possible because of grace. Sin reminds us that we will always be saying "my bad." But God's Word and with God's help we can turn and live. Amid the limits of the human heart resides God's grace, calling us, desiring us, and helping us to turn, to turn and live!

AMEN