



Monday Musing: Monday August 4, 2025.
Sinning...

Isn't that a weird title for today? Isn't it a weird word that carries an awful lot of baggage!? What is it to sin? In the forest we talk about a lot of things often inspired by the path we're on. But sinning? That's not been one of them. So why is it in my head? Because I've been reading the psalms this summer.

With my church family, we're having a *Summer Psalm Challenge*. We're recording all the psalms we're reading and circling those that we especially like or that mean something to us. Sinning is a part of the ancient psalms. But what is it to sin?

In archery, to sin is to miss the mark or fall short of the mark. It comes from the Greek term *hamartia*. Basically, your arrow didn't hit the centre. In the bible, and in the psalms in particular, to sin is most often to fall short of following God's laws, to have not been obedient to God, to God's ordinances, that is, the Ten Commandments and more. Missing the mark of holiness, you might say, as the commandments teach us how to be in relationship with God and each other.

But it gets confusing too just like some of the paths we take. Sometimes the paths are covered over with branches, and we have to look carefully and circumnavigate the branches so as not to trip. Same goes for reading the psalms because the implication in many psalms, also in the Book of Job, is that God punishes those who 'sin' and does so with sicknesses or personal or community tragedies. Do you believe that? Does sickness come from 'missing the mark'?

Years ago, my aunt was very ill. She was not that much older than me. I loved being with her and having fun and she taught me to drive in her husband's car with the 454 engine! Sweet. She was the best. She had leukemia. One day she phoned my Mom and Dad because someone had told her that she must have done something very bad for God to punish her with leukemia. None of us believed that. How could we?

My aunt's life and death contributed to the shaping of my understanding of God, illness, and prayer. I had to re-adjust my beliefs in God, of God, and my expectations around prayer, anointing, and laying on of hands. The words of the psalms, some of them, were comforting as my priest had said go read the psalms. But some of the words were very disturbing too. Some of them seem to refer more to *Zeus* or *Jupiter*, the gods of the Greeks and the Romans.

I do not believe God causes illness and suffering. I do not believe suffering comes as punishment for sinning against God. Given the suffering that is happening today in Gaza and Ukraine, and that approximately 6 million children under 15 die each year, which is 16,000 to 17,000 every day, what could they possibly have done to deserve such suffering and death? In punishment for what? Some would say for not believing the right way. Where does the fault, or sin, really lie?

I do believe that God is good, all the time, that our Creator God, means to co-create with us a world of justice and wholeness and peace. Our United Church's statement of belief is that God is creatively and redemptively at work in all humanity, in all the world. I believe this. Do you?

Reading the psalms we must remember when they were written and by whom and why. Some were written by King David. Go google his story. Some were written during the time of wars with empires or the return from exile from Babylon. Some are musical songs. Some psalms are prayers for deliverance, or coronation hymns, or songs of praise. Whichever it is, remember they were written in different times and places with the ancients' understanding of God and the world around them in their time. Some of those psalms, prayers and songs, can still speak to our hearts today. Just not all of them.

The modern theologian Paul Tillich did not use the word sin to mean an act against God as in immorality even. He said it was more about 'estrangement,' a separation from what gives us ultimate meaning and purpose in life. Estrangement from each other, the stranger, and God. Estrangement makes more sense to me. And it is that which we can mend too.

Peace to your hearts as you journey through the five books of psalms,

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Prayer

Holy God, from the ancients we hear of suffering, struggles, wars and pains,
And we hear of hopes, dreams, pleas and praise.
May we learn of their psalms, their songs and poems,
May we place them in their times and places,
And may we learn to write our own for our time and our place,
For our struggles, and for our hopes and dreams too.
This we pray today, as we seek to make sense of our world,
And as we seek to know you among us and in the depths of our souls. Amen.

Scripture

Isaiah 1:1-20	Come, let's argue it out, declares God to Israel.
Psalms 50	God the Almighty has spoken.
Hebrews 11:1-16	Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.
Luke 12:32-40	Be ready; be dressed for action.

Bible Tidbits

The stories of our bible present different reasons for pain and suffering. What do you believe today is the cause of pain and suffering? How does that then affect that for which you pray?