

Missing the Mark

1 John 3:1-7

Would you consider yourself a saint or a sinner? *story about the real housewives of Beverly Hills*

I think we all would like to think we behave better than the real housewives of Beverly Hills, but at least they are getting paid to act a fool. We just do it, because we are humans. We would love to believe that we are all good and righteous all the time, and get to look down our noses at others. We would like to ignore the parts of us that are not so holy and focus on the ones that are. Sin is not a polite conversation topic. So when I first looked at this passage I thought to myself oh great, we get to talk about sin- and I wish Dan was preaching on this subject and not me. All of the fire and brimstone teachings of my youth flooded my brain. If there is one subject that makes me uncomfortable, it is sin. You want to talk to me about allegory in the bible, or debate why there are two creation stories, or whether revelation will literally happen as it is written, then I am game for wrestling these hard topics.

And it is not the idea of right and wrong that make me uncomfortable, but the judgemental attitude that comes with the idea. The attitude that some people carry that there are saints and there are sinners. Which baffles my mind because all have sinned

and fallen short, but let's not get ahead of ourselves yet. So not knowing where to start, I went to my english linguistic roots and said okay so what greek word is the author using for sin in this passage- what influence does this word have on what this passage means. And the greek word used here for sin is ἁμαρτία (ha-mar-tia).

Hamartia is translated as missing the mark. What is so fascinating about this word used with this particular scripture is that when it is taken out of the context of 1 John, it could be used as a weapon of legalism and judgement.

However when we look at the context of this passage within 1 John, we see that it is sandwiched within scriptures discussing God's love and our call to love god. Not only to our call to love God, but to love one another. This passage as well as the passage below it in 1 John are directly calling us out for failing to follow the greatest commandments:

Love the Lord your god with all your heart, soul, and mind.

Love your neighbor as thyself.

When we fail to do this, when we fail to love God and one another that is when we are missing the mark. That is when we have committed Hamartia. This is when we step off the path of righteousness and love that Jesus has laid out before for us.

The part that is so hard to accept and understand about this is that we know we are going to miss the mark. We will fail to love God and each other well. That is just a part of being human. We will mess up. We will lie to spare someone's feelings. We will get angry and yell at people. We will gossip about each other. We will support systems of power that harm others, because we do not want to be uncomfortable. We will fail to love each other unconditionally.

Sometimes, we will make God into who we want God to be in our minds, because it is much easier to love and communion with a God who thinks and acts like us. Especially when that God will only love and accept the people we choose as worthy. The people who are easy to love. When we know that God loves all of God's children, even those we find hard to love.

Even though we are acknowledging right now that we are humans who will miss the mark sometimes, please do not use that as an excuse to just behave anyway you want. To follow Jesus, to be this thing we call a Christian, means that you are agreeing to a process. A process of missing the mark, asking for

forgiveness, and trying again- hoping that with each try you get a little better at loving God and your neighbor- that with each try you move further on the path of righteousness and love that Jesus has laid out for us.

This is not a new concept. John Wesley- yes, I am bringing out the founder of the Methodist church in a Baptist church on a sunday. I do understand how funny that is- but this passage was one of main focus for Wesley's works. He focused a good chunk of his study on this process we are talking about. He called it sanctification, which means to be made righteous, holy, or pure. The goal of this process is to become more and more like Jesus Christ every day, as we see referenced in today's scripture.

The key to this process of sanctification, or as the author of 1 John says becoming pure, is God's grace. Within God's unconditional love for us, comes God's grace. The grace that doesn't cast us aside when we miss the mark, but allows us to acknowledge we have missed the mark, ask for forgiveness, and try again. Hoping that this time, we take what we have learned from our mistakes and get closer and closer to getting it right.

God's grace is the good news in this passage. God's grace does not mean that our actions or missing the mark won't have consequences, because we know we will have consequences when we mess up... If I forget to put gas in my car before driving

to Denver, my car may run out of gas on the highway. That doesn't mean that my car is broken forever or won't run again. It just means that it won't run again until I make that awkward phone call to Graham, telling him I messed up and need help. I may have to wait a bit for him to get there with gas, but he will get there. It doesn't mean that if I lie to my sister that I don't hurt her or our relationship that may have long term effects on us, but it does mean that with God's grace I can try to ask for her forgiveness and try again.

That is the good news. That God's grace is abundant. That God is willing and wanting to go through this process with us. The other good news is that we are not alone on this journey. We have each other- our church family- to walk alongside with. It doesn't mean we will love each other perfectly as we have already said, but we can try and try again to get it right... and maybe one day with God's grace we will. Amen.