

We've been doing a sermon series on the major concepts to come out of the Reformation. Remember the reformation? Martin Luther tacking a list of 95 challenges to the Roman Church on a door in Wittenberg 500 years ago and things began to change. The power of the church over individuals lessened and people began to speak directly to God in prayer, to read the Bible in their own language and to understand scripture without a higher authority telling them what it meant.

You have hit the jackpot because the concept for today is Total Depravity. It's a funny topic for blessing of the animals service or maybe not. Our dog leaves a path of destruction in her wake. I won't list all my beloved things that have been broken, swallowed, taken outside and buried, chewed, destroyed. Star – where are you. We've found that bones - \$40 elk horns, keep her occupied; those and soft toys – that look adorable to us but to Star, look like prey. She and our other dog Charlie, gut – removing eyes and strewing their stuffing all over the living room. When Carol discovers this scene I hear her mumbling "Now why did you have to do that?" Why do you have to destroy everything?" Sometimes Carol tries to stop me giving them to her at all. "You know she's just going to tear it up." But I remind her, "Star is a dog. She is expressing her nature. She tears the guts out of toys because that's what dogs do. Right now your pets, your dogs and cats, and birds and lambs are doing what they are supposed to do – they are being dogs and cats, birds, and lambs. They don't get up in the morning and ponder the day before them. They only have one task: to be a fish. As destructive as they can be you cannot rightfully apply the term Total Depravity to them. It's what they know: how to be birds, and they do a great job at it.

Total depravity - what a term. It's not something we'd put on a dating site profile, but you have to admit it's the kind of thing that captures your attention. It conjures up images of medieval demons attacking helpless maidens and a genre of cartoon you might have found in playboy with leering satyrs and naked women, or on WWI posters with babies on bayonets wielded by the enemy. I'll stop with the images – Total Depravity is a phrase rich with them. Which is why we find it so difficult to apply it to ourselves. But the truth is, the boring, familiar truth is that Total Depravity is ordinary. We lie; we gossip; we pass by someone in need of help because we just don't have the time. We harbor uncharitable thoughts about others; lose our tempers with our kids and spouses, and on and on. We start each day wanting not to repeat the sins of the day before but let a slow driver get in our way and without a thought we are using words that would make a sailor blush. We all fall prey to these things - all of us, even you. That's why we heard Paul lament his own inability to stop sinning. "**15** I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." he says.

These sins that we commit daily are so often part of the one large sin that grieves God's heart: our desire to be God ourselves. Paul again from Romans: "God gave them up **25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." We lie to control our public appearance – to boost our image or disguise our failings; we lose our temper when something defies or defiles us – when our plans are interfered with. We keep others at a distance with gossip or indifference because we are absolutely terrified for another person to see the truth of who we are. Or perhaps worse, for us to see the beauty of them. We turn aside from unpleasantness for fear of contamination or fear that our lives will be absorbed. Many of the ways we sin put distance between ourselves and God, avoiding God as if God

weren't already everywhere. We think God wants our perfection; perhaps we want our perfection as well.

So, why did the reformers lift up this concept, Total Depravity, as one of the main foundations for Christianity? Were they doing exactly what we fear from a religious institution – locating our sins and berating us for them? Piling on the guilt, breaking us so that we are nothing but a quivering mass of shame. Were the reformers any different from the Roman church telling people about the horrors of purgatory and then selling them indulgences as a way out? Is there Good News in here? If so where is it? If Paul cannot overcome his sinful nature, what chance do we have.

The reformers read the Bible - all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God - they read that and rejoiced. Luther who had been so tortured by his inability to divest himself of sin was overjoyed, relieved, when his study of the scriptures confirmed that no one can do enough to wipe away their sinfulness - his joy didn't come from company in his sinfulness, but in realizing that God knows this, knows that we are helpless to change – WITHOUT God's help, without God's freely given grace. Martin Luther's torture had ended – and his ministry began. He understood the nature of God, and wanted to share it with others.

Helping us to understand that, even when we are deeply entangled in sin, it is our nature, our human condition that we can rest on. At our most basic, as that piece of us that existed before we were blond or male or grouchy - when all is stripped away - we are children of God and intended for relationship with God. We sin because we have forgotten our rightful home - enfolded in God's arms. When we, like Paul, find ourselves helpless to become the person we want to be, we hide from God. But we were created to throw up our arms in surrender and finally turn to God showing both God and ourselves the full truth of who we are. We are meant for God and God is waiting for us; predisposed to love us – not because we earned it – we cannot earn God's love; we can however return to God with an eagerness to be in relationship.

And when we've done that, when we've turned away from the self we want to create and embrace the self we were created to be - a creature dependent on God - there is a peace and quietness where before there was the constant chatter of our inner voice driving and judging us. The peace of connection is not one of inaction or a lack of will. It is the peace that enables us to hear, feel, and love God.

Total Depravity - a concept begun by Augustine as Original Sin, and lived out by humankind. Do not turn your eyes away from it - you know it's there - acknowledge it and bring it to God.