

God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21 EHV)

What a Deal

“I just bought this not too long ago. I got a really good deal on it. It was only...”

Ever say something like that? I didn't notice it all that much until recently when I learned that many people outside of our area see this as a very Midwest thing to say. After making a purchase we feel this need, almost obligation to assure someone, “It was a good deal.” Or, “They gave me a good deal.” There's nothing wrong with it. No one wants to feel cheated. No one wants to find out they fell for a scam. We want to be sure this is worth it. From toddlers trading toys, trading desserts at lunch in grade school, and throughout our lives we are asking, “What is in it for me? Are you asking too much? Am I getting a good deal?” Then if it seems too good to be true, we are immediately skeptical. “What's wrong with it? Where's the hidden agenda?” Check the fine print and search for the possible strings attached.

We see what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21 and wow, what a deal. It doesn't get much simpler than this. It's pretty straightforward. But, as it is Confirmation Sunday, I invite you to come with me back into those desks of Confirmation and Catechism class. There we ask ourselves, “What does this mean?”

What does this mean that Christ did not know sin? We know sin. We see sin everywhere. It's inescapable in this world. Even the saintliest of grandmas have sinned. “To err is human,” one poet wrote. We have a number of common sayings and clichés about our human imperfections. Everyone makes mistakes. Nobody's perfect.

Sin is to miss a mark. Here's the bulls-eye of what you are supposed to do, and you miss it. Even if you're only off of by fraction of millimeter, it still doesn't count. It's the promises you made to your kid to be better and you weren't. It's the white lie you told your spouse to make them feel a little better. It's the spending too much time working while neglecting your other callings and responsibilities. It's not getting 100% on that test. It's the sickness in your body. It's the broken friendships. We could go on; suffice it to say: we know sin.

But do we know sin in that what it does? Obviously, we see enough of the ramifications and consequences. You may know it as in an academic way so you can give the right answer in class if called upon. But do you really *know* sin and its seriousness? This can be a little more difficult.

It's hard because we are excuse making factories always pumping out more excuses and improving on old ones to keep us feeling comfortable with our decisions in life. Our sinful nature downplays the seriousness of those sins quickly rushing in, “But what about *so-and-*

so and what they did?” It’s quick to make excuses for others and their sins because maybe we are defending ourselves and afraid to face the truth of our own sins. It’s eager to listen to the world that you should feel this way. It’s not hard to find some person or some group to validate your sinful action and assure you that you have every right and deserve to do it. The thing is, you know what God’s Word says. Honestly, the sins we wrestle with the most, we know what we should do. But then we listen to the devil’s age-old question, “Does God really say? Does he really mean?” And after weighing God’s desires against our own, so often our desires win out. But then no matter how much it disgusts us afterwards, we often find ourselves struggling again tomorrow because, “Maybe this time will be different?”

So then we are back at it. Maybe this particular sin, you know it’s wrong, but it isn’t all that bad, is it? I’ll make up for it later. I promise to do better next time. I just need to make sure I make myself right with God. You know: feel bad, go to church every now and then, throw some money in the offering, speak a prayer at least before meals, and we should be good to go! God is love after all.

The psalm writer asks, “Who may stand in the Lord’s holy place? The one who has a clean hands and a pure heart” (Psalm 24:3,4). Clean hands means always hitting the mark. Pure heart means no selfish motivation and the right attitude. Not sometimes, always hitting the bulls-eye every time. And we’ve already said it: we don’t. Therefore, we can’t make ourselves right with God. We dare not be in his presence. He should strike us down where we are right now. But it’s not just the missed marks and sins we commit. It’s what we are by nature. We can neither make ourselves right with God nor want to do so. On our own we would be on the fast track to eternal suffering in hell because that’s the result of not being right with God.

So now we look at this deal more closely. We see what we are—sinners—we see what Jesus is—sinless. We aren’t what God expects us to be! It quickly becomes apparent: what a terrible deal! How could God put his own Son in such a situation?

Because you needed a substitute. I needed someone to take my place. We needed someone to be what we are not so that we might be what He is.

Here’s the thing: Jesus knew sin, in that, he knew what sin was. He saw it happen. He was there in the Garden seeing how that first sin shatters to pieces the perfect relationship between God and his creation. He saw how sin had taken God’s creatures of life and made them creatures of death. He saw the debt of sin only grow more and pile up higher.

He knew sin while he lives on this earth, in that he felt the temptations just as you do. He was, after all, tempted in every way. He didn’t get off any easier than the next human being. He saw with his own human eyes how sins corrupts and taints. He saw how

mankind even in their best moments are too weak to resist. He sees the burden weighing down their shoulders and plaguing their souls.

At the same time, Jesus didn't know sin in that he didn't know what it was like to sin. He didn't know what it was like to go against God's will and to feel that shameful guilt. He never experienced not wanting to please God. The temptation was there; but he always resists. He didn't know what it was to weigh his desires against God's desires because they were one in the same. Here's a guy who always loves his neighbor as himself. In Jesus we see what God created mankind to be and what Adam lost at the Fall.

But that sin still need to be taken care of. A just God cannot ignore sin. Eventually the bill comes and you have to pay it. Punishment must come down. It's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of angry God. So Jesus rides into Jerusalem to the waving of palm branches to do just that. A sacrifice needs to be made. The Lamb goes into Jerusalem to take away the sins of the world. He is the answer to those cries of Hosanna, God save us!

So God made him who did not know sin to be sin for us. The very thing that God hates, he makes his Son. He identifies Jesus, the sinless one, and treats him as the one and only sinner, the sinner of sinners. As Jesus hangs from the cross and God dumps sins of billions upon billions of people on him, he no longer sees an innocent and sinless person. He sees a sinner who bears the sin of the persecutor and murder, the denier of Him and the cheater, the sins of the rebellious and lazy. Whatever you or I or anyone else have done or will do have already become the sins of Christ, as though he committed them himself. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Your sins are no longer your own; they belong to Jesus. So the Lord crushes Jesus under his wrath. He punishes Jesus who receives the verdict, "Guilty as charged!" Jesus endures the torments of hell and the Father forsakes him. Jesus became sin for us.

Why? "So that in him you became the righteousness of God." What. A. Deal. You are now right with God already at the cross. Need proof? On Easter morning Jesus lives. It's a done deal. It's a fact. For you, for me, for the world. Standing in God's courtroom, there are no accusations that can be brought against you. With his nail-marked hands, He's washed your hands clean. With the blood pouring off those cross beams, He's washed you and given you a pure heart. Believe it. What seems like a terrible deal to us was the deal struck by Jesus for you. For the joy of making you right with God he became sin for you. By Jesus' perfect life and innocent death, through his blood poured out for you, rooted in Christ all is well between God and you. Not I will be in the future. But, right now, today, in fact already at the cross, your sins are forgiven. You have a right standing with God. And he made it your own through faith the Spirit creates through the Word and Baptism.

What a deal! And to make it even better, there are no strings attached or hidden agendas. God neither asks for repayment nor wants you to try. You don't need to try and prove you

deserve it. It's already yours and sealed to you at your baptism. So what is there left to do? Share it. Serve God and follow his will. Serve God by serving your neighbor putting others before yourself. Life isn't you trying to make yourself right with God. In Jesus you already are. Now he invites you to be here, in His house, His holy place, in His presence. He comes to you in Word and the Sacraments of Baptism and Lord's Supper. Use it, regularly. It's such a simple truth but so great. The single most important thing in your life is your relationship with Jesus. As Cooper (our confirmand who chose this verse for his Confirmation) said himself, this passage is special to him because he knows Jesus has taken your sins away and you don't to live with the weight of sins on your back. You are right with God.

So now we leave today riding with Jesus into Jerusalem into Holy Week. As we look ahead to the horrors of Calvary and the cross we are assured of the joy of Easter. As sure as we are that Easter will come after Good Friday this year, it was as sure in Jesus' day too. There was no question about it. What a deal. Amen.