

1. Story:

My name is Debbie, and I'm part of the preaching team here at Catalyst. I am a mom; to two great kids, a six year old son and an eighteen year old daughter and I am a wife and a teacher and a small business owner and a friend and daughter and and and and.... You get the point. You could as well write a long list of all the roles you play every day or what hat you have to currently put on depending on your location. The more I think about the list of roles that I have taken on and the people that I could let down the more it weighs on me.

Social media, your peers and society pull you in too or as a mom that sees Instagram posts of the perfectly executed Pinterest birthday party, a working mom of four with her perfect beach body at the pool, a well-balanced preplanned dinner on the table at 6PM sharp with your kids science project done or completing the top 100 checklist of how to have a perfect summer with your children. I see these moms and I am in awe wondering how I could juggle all of this. And these women seem to do it all while never raising their voice, nagging, stressing and pulling it off on time and to perfection!! Trying to create this utopia in my home creates a lot of anxiety for me because I have not hit the bull's eye to the perfect party, the game winning shot at the buzzer to complete our top 100 summer fun to do list, a Instagram worthy meal (this will never happened) or won the race of the beach body mom at the pool, I am size mom!

I feel too overwhelmed to do all of these roles well, practically perfect I am all of a sudden frozen standing in my home and feel like I have a lead vest on and can't move another step and I can't move fast enough or that I am suffocating and my chest is caving in and I can't breathe. I am than shorter with my spouse, take it out on the dog, snap at my children when they did not do anything, and this makes me less of the person I want to be.

I want to talk about that weight today - that weight we all feel that we are not hitting the mark, that we let ourselves down, let our friends and family down, let God down. It's a real thing, this weight. Of course some of it is wrong expectations - we could all afford to try harder not to live up to impossible standards.

But we really *do* miss the mark. I really *am* short with Casey and my kids sometimes. I really *do* fail. The weight is real.

That weight is sin, and today is about finding freedom from sin. Freedom to be who you want to be, who we are called to be, to find the freedom in Jesus' death. The hope and love of Jesus Christ who died for us demonstrates how much God values each one of us. Each one of us are loved by God everyday where we are. And because God loves us, God

wants us to be cognizant of how we miss the mark - and how we can follow his path to life.

3. Series intro: Believe

Our series this summer is called “Believe”. We are working our way through the Apostles Creed, line by line and belief by belief. The Apostle’s Creed is one of the oldest statements about what Christians believe. We began by insisting that belief is not something that sits at the doors of our Church. These are not a quiz we have to ace before we’re allowed to belong. Rather, these beliefs are our goal. They invite us to trust the wisdom of the Church over the past 2,000 years. And we’ve been insisting that for our beliefs to *matter*, they have to shape our behavior. We have to be able to SEE our beliefs for them to make a difference.

For the last couple of weeks, we’ve been talking specifically about Jesus - that he is both fully God and fully human. Last week we saw that Jesus shows us how to be human. He shows us what it looks like to hit the mark.

This week, the Apostles Creed goes on to say “**We believe Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell.**”

We’re talking about why Jesus died. If you’ve been around Church at all, you know that “Jesus died for our sins.” But what does that mean?

If Jesus died for our sins, it is important to look at the word sin and what it means. The word Sin comes with a lot of baggage. It’s wielded as a weapon, full of judgment and shame.

The word the New Testament uses is the Greek word “hamartia” which means to “miss the mark”. It’s an archery term.

Have you missed the mark with a goal, a deadline, a relationship, an obligation you have made with someone? We all have, no one is perfect. How did you feel after this happened? Did you beat yourself up over it? Did you feel like you should have done something different?

4.

[**Scripture Slide 1**] Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 7. Romans is a letter written by Paul, one of the early Christians, to a church he’d never visited before. He’s planning to visit them, so the letter is his way of introducing himself.

The Roman Church was experiencing racial tensions - some of the members were Jews, part of God's chosen people. Others were Gentiles - outsiders who had found the love of God through Jesus. For the first half of the letter, Paul has been demonstrating that it doesn't matter if you are one of God's chosen people or not. It doesn't matter whether you're an insider or an outsider. It doesn't matter if you're a Pinterest mom or a regular ole mom. We have all missed the mark. We're all sinners.

His argument crescendos here in chapter 7 where he describes what Sin does to us. You know that anxiety we feel when we miss the mark, that heavy lead vest that settles on us? Well, this should sound pretty familiar to you:

14 So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. **15** I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. **16** But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. **17** So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. **18** And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. **19** I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. **20** But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. **21** I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. **22** I love God's law with all my heart. **23** But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. **24** Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? -- Romans 7:14-24

Paul talks about Sin as this weight, this force, that crushes him, that keeps him from doing what he knows he should do. That keeps him from being who he knows he should be. He says, "When I stop and think about my life, I know I miss the mark. I know I settle for less than God created me for..."

...And it makes me feel *miserable*. All I can see are my failures. All I can see is how I miss the mark. All I can feel is this weight on my chest, suffocating me.

5. God hates sinners

We might hope that God would be some help here, but we've heard from many churches that God hates sin... which pretty easily translates into God hating sinners. Because we've missed the mark, we imagine God looks at us with disgust, with judgment and condemnation.

I spoke to a friend recently that said she felt guilty for having to leave her fifth grader a few days after she had to have her tonsils removed to attend a required work conference. Her daughter is 31 now!! Can you imagine carrying that guilt and shame for decades?

Yes, we can imagine it because so many of us do. We carry around the weight of our sin, convinced that because we can't forgive ourselves, neither can God.

We resonate with Paul's lament at the end of Romans 7: "What a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life dominated by sin and death?"

Paul gives an answer though: "Thank God: The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Jesus saves us from Sin. Specifically, Jesus' death rescues us! Friends, we have to be very clear here: God hates sin because God loves sinners. That feeling of anxiety, of the lead vest weighing us down?

This is not what God wants for us. He doesn't want us standing feeling like we can't breathe. He doesn't want me to fail as a good mom, a good friend, a good wife. He wants me to see the spiritual gifts he has given to me and use them to love others as Jesus loved others. He wants me to feel the freedom of having a messing house because my children are loved and have time being spent with them. He wants me to have a birthday party with a simple boxed cake because it is about celebrating the day He made me a mom and blessed my family's world with my blonde firecracker of a son!! God wants us to be happy & feel His grace when we have sinned, missed the mark or dropped out of the race.

Last week, we talked about what it means to be fully human - that to be human is not to fail, but to soar. Sin is what makes us less. Sin diminishes God's image in us. Sin shrinks us in and makes us small and keeps us from being who God created us to be.

God *hates* that. God hates it for the same reason *we* hate it. Because God loves us and God wants us to flourish.

We get it all mixed up and think because God hates sin, that God hates us. But Scripture couldn't be more clear:

This is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16

Jesus' death on the Cross was God's way of rescuing us from Sin. Not because God hated us. But because God LOVES us. When we have sinned, acted out, hurt others, not loved our neighbor as ourselves, that Sin diminishes us. It shrinks us and suffocates us and makes us small. Sin makes us less than the full humans God created us to be.

God's response to our sin is love. God meets us in our sin and takes the weight of sin for us. On the Cross, Jesus unbuckles the vest that suffocates us, takes it off of us and puts it on himself. On the Cross, God shows us love, sets us free from sin and for life.

God so hated the world...? Not according to the Cross. God so was disappointed in the world? Not according to the Cross. God so condemned the world? Not according to the Cross. The Cross shows us that God so LOVED the world!! Sin makes us want to hide in shame. But the Cross invites us to seek him in these times of darkness.

7. Are you basically saying that sin doesn't matter?

Let's be careful here not to suggest that God doesn't care about sin. Is God like the doting Grandpa that gives you candy and pats you on the head even when you have been bad? No, God takes sin very seriously (Hard to look at Jesus crucified and think God doesn't care about sin!) God wants to release our sin, to live in the freedom we were created for. God wants to see us flourish (just like as parents we hate the things that hurt our kids, even when they are choices our kids are making.)

[**Scripture Slide 2**] Turn over to Hebrews 12. This is a sermon given to new Christians who were suffering and tempted to abandon faith in Jesus. The preacher is encouraging them to remain faithful. At this point in the sermon, the preacher is considering some of the pain they are experiencing as consequences of their sin. She challenges them to consider that God might be disciplining them... that even experiencing the consequences of our sin may be proof that God loves us: starting in verse five:

Have you forgotten the encouraging words God spoke to you as his children? He said, "My child, don't make light of the Lord's discipline and don't give up when he corrects you. **6** For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child."**7** As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father? **8** If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all. **9** Since we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we submit even more to the discipline of the Father of our spirits, and live forever? **10** For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. **11** No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. -- Hebrews 12:5-11

A parent who doesn't discipline their child doesn't really love their child. Because discipline helps us grow up into the persons we are supposed to be. In the same way, if

God simply ignored our sin, God could not truly love us. It's the very fact of God's love for us that requires God to take our sin so seriously. Because God wants to rescue us, to help us grow up into the persons we were created to be. And if God takes our sin seriously, we should too.

9. We don't like talking about sin

We don't like to talk about our Sin. Even when I sat down to talk to JR about this sermon I asked, "Why did you pick me for this message?" He just said, "It was the week that you had open to preach." Even still, I felt guilty, shame just in hearing that this was my week because I would have to dig down deep and share with others my struggles. We all struggle, we all pull the bow back, release the arrow and watch it land wide of the mark we were aiming for. We are all guilty, we all play a part. Even if it is as the supporting or the leading role we play a part in sin. In big and small ways, we're all sinners. We're all diminished. We all miss the mark.

If we don't start with honest confessions, we can't be freed to be who God calls us to be. Or as you have sat in your chair today have you felt that weight of the lead vest as you think about your sin or gone through your week, but God welcomes that! He wants to take that vest off, he wants to breathe oxygen back into your lungs and bring you back to life and the person you need to be. The way that sin makes us feel small is not who we have to be.

We all miss the mark. We all feel worthless and not worthy of God's love. We all experience the weight of sin, making us small, diminishing our humanity.

12. We believe

But here at Catalyst, we believe that Jesus was crucified, died and was buried... and that means we ALL have infinite worth. We all matter.

We believe Jesus was crucified. That means he has forgiven our sin, so we are free to forgive others' sin.

We believe Jesus was crucified. That means he freed us to become who we were created to be.

We believe Jesus was crucified not because God so pities the world. Not because God so judged the world. Not because God so hates the world. Jesus was crucified because God so *loved* the world.

When we turn to God and confess our sin...

My gateway to sin is procrastination. I say I work better under pressure or get my best work done the closer to the deadline. This is just me making excuses or coping with the long list of items I must complete at work and home in a shorter and shorter amount of time. A few months ago, I felt my threshold of responsibilities coming to a breaking point. I was short with my son. He would ask to play a game and have to remind me to put away my phone. This wasn't fair to him, he just wanted to spend time with me playing his favorite game. I didn't sit in the living room with my family as I should have watching our favorite show together, but instead worked in the office. I would stay up late to complete tasks I should have already done at work, but had once again said yes at school to my boss for helping with an event. This made me more tired not giving all I could to my family and friends. It all came to a head one night walking out of my bedroom. I felt like I couldn't breathe, a pain down my arm and heavy vest weighing on my chest. I had reached it, the threshold broke and I couldn't do anymore.

When I am feeling like I can't breathe, that I can't 'deal' anymore with what has been put in front of me I stop right then and pray. I ask God to stand next to me, to take off that heavy vest off, give me a clear mind to conquer what I need to conquer and get me through the day. I ask him to appreciate the blessings he has given me and manage my time better to live fully with and in these blessings. If I have to do this a dozen times a day, I do it!! As soon as I pray, release my breath I instantly feel the heavy vest taken off of me and the power to keep going.

Our failures don't define us! We refuse to live small lives, we chose to live a worthy big life because Jesus was crucified.

Communion

[**Communion Slide**] We come to the Communion Table today because Jesus invites us to receive the peace he achieves through the Cross. This communion table invites us to share the meal Jesus shared with his followers the night before he was killed, when he broke bread and gave it to us, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Eat it."

Later in the meal, he passed a cup of wine, saying, "This cup is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it."

At the Table, we find God's love for us, a love so all-encompassing that God gave up his own life for us. God died so that we could be free from sin, free to live the lives God calls us to.

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive Communion. If you're ready to be done with Sin, if you want to let God remove that weight from you and find the freedom God has always intended for you, then you're welcome to come forward today.

Before we approach the table, we're going to say the Creed together, as an affirmation of who we are as a Church.

Let's read together:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer:

Dear God, our creator and Father, who became human in Jesus Christ,

We stand before you today as sinners who are well-acquainted with the weight of our failure. We know too-well how often we have missed the mark, how often we are not who you created us to be. We confess that to you today, together.

We stand before you sinners, overwhelmed at your impossible love and goodness. We stand before you and hear your invitation to come to your table today. Faced with our sin, you offer your own body and blood, that we might not be abandoned to death, crushed beneath the weight of our sin, but rather rescued and redeemed by your very life.

We come before you this morning, bringing our anxieties, our insecurities, our fear that we cannot truly be freed from this weight. In return, we receive wafers and juice, and

pray the become a spiritual food that nourishes us to receive your love and grace, food that gives us the strength to walk in your freedom, to be the people you called us to be.

Send us from this place back into your world to be examples and ambassadors of your love and mercy for the whole world.

We offer these prayers and approach your table in the name of your son, Jesus.

Assignment and blessing

A couple of things before you go:

Thank you to all who are supporting Catalyst financially. Your faithfulness in this area helps us continue to do what God is calling us to do.

Thank you again to the guests with us. We know it can be hard to connect with a new Church, so we wanted to make it as easy as possible to do that. We created an experience called Newcomers Lunch we do once a month (the next one is July 16). It's right after we worship together, and in about 45 minutes, we feed you, tell you who Catalyst is, what God is doing here, and we give you a next step to get connected. If you'd like to sign up, you can check the box at the top of the tear off we did earlier, and drop it in the box by the door on your way out. Either way, thank you again for worshipping with us.

Now, as you're going: God's response to sin is love. God sets us free from sin and for life. John 3:16 says, **"This is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16**

How does God love the world? By dying for us!! God gave his only son for us, because he loved us. There is power and peace in this verse. The power of this verse can release your vest, bring you back up for air when your sins are too much to bear, invite you into the light from the darkness and bring you peace in feeling God's love for you!

When you came in today, there was a card on your seat (hold up your card). It's got a blank there, so you can put your name in place of "the world":

This is how God loved Michael, This is how God loved Lynn, this is how God loved Jennifer, This is how God loved Sarah, this is how God loved John: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life

I want us all to try an exercise. We are going to repeat John 3:16, just like I did but replace the words ‘the world’ with YOUR name. This is how God so loved YOU that he gave his one and only son!

Let’s try it....

This is how God loved _____: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. -- John 3:16

How did that feel? Did it feel different? Maybe a little awkward? Imagine a time when that vest is heavy, the weight of sin is too much to bear, you are struggling, you missed the mark, you repeat this verse, but make it personal. This is how God so loved YOU that he gave his one and only son!

God loved us before we loved ourselves. He forgives our sins without asking for anything in return. There is no tally sheet, no drawing board, no game to play. We don’t have to make any promises to him, just to love others, forgive and walk closer to him every day.

Go now, knowing you’re loved so much that God died for you. Go knowing that God has set you free from the weight of your sin that you might live in the freedom of his calling. Go and use that freedom to show the whole world God’s love.

Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.