

060318-11 AM

Genesis 3:1-7

“DCE’s and Sin”

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

In our great wisdom, as pastors, we decided to preach a four-part sermon series on the heavy-duty topic of sin, beginning June 3. And then we scheduled this joyful event to take place on June 3. Perhaps not the very best occasion to preach about original sin, hereditary guilt, and the universal depravity of humanity.

Or is it? We happen to have here today an exemplary, standout sinner: Steve. And right here this morning we have a tremendously knowledgeable expert on sin: Wesley. And I stand with them. I’m steeped in sin, too. We all are. And that’s the point.

We’re all in the same boat. Adam and Eve’s sin has been passed down to all of us. Pastors, vicars, DCE’s, DCE’s parents, little kids, youth, parents, seniors, North Carolina natives, Midwest or Northeast or West Coast transplants, Lutherans, pseudo-Lutherans, wanna-be-Lutherans, Democrats, Republicans, Eastern North Carolina BBQ fans, Western North Carolina BBQ fans ... every last one of us is an accomplished sin expert.

Stand up with Wesley and Steve and me if you know all about sin in your heart.

OK, you can sit down. Wait, stand up with us again if you know all about the grace and love of Jesus Christ in your heart. Thank God for all of you. Thank God for Jesus’ love. That’s why we’re here today. Please have a seat again.

That’s why, Steve and Wesley, we are here today. That’s why God has called you into the ministry. That’s why God

called you – not “called” (phone) you, but called (heart) you – to be professional church workers.

Because there is a world of people out there who are still lost in their sin, cut off yet from their God, separated at this very moment because of sin from their Maker. There are thousands of people right here in Wake Forest who don't know the story of Jesus and his love, how the Son of God sacrificed his life to pay for their sins. There are people in our own church who've heard about being saved by grace through faith, as the Bible proclaims, but are still trying to figure out what they have to do to be saved. And there are lots and lots of children and youth here at Hope who are still learning and growing and needing more help to learn what this wonderful Christian faith of ours is all about.

Here's one (Brynley). Think of all she has to learn about Jesus, about the Bible, about what it will mean for her to grow up as a child of God in this crazy world. Think of all the ways that you, Steve, and you, Wesley, and this church of ours, can be a blessing to Brynley and her family.

That's why you're here. That's what God has called you to do. That's what DCE's do. Bring the young and the old to know Christ and his great love. Talk about sin. Talk about repentance. But talk boldly and passionately, also, about the love of Christ for sinners, and the forgiveness that has made such an impact on your own lives. That's what DCE's do.

How great is this job you've been given! And how extraordinary it is that we are commissioning and installing two DCE's today.

We made a bold move last year and asked for two interns. No church has ever done that before in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, we're told. But we made it work in our budget, with the help of some grant money from our District.

We got the OK from our leadership team, from our congregational assembly, and from the university in late January 2017. But these two knew nothing about it.

Even when Pastor Lew and I just happened to show up in mid-February at a church conference in Arizona that we knew Steve and Wesley and their DCE classmates would be attending, and then spent two full days and nights hanging out with them, hearing their stories, asking them all sorts of ridiculously-personal questions, watching them interact with their peers, learning of their extreme love for food when we bought them dinner, they had no idea that we were conducting an extensive clandestine interview.

We came back from that conference, shaking our heads, wondering if we and the people of Hope were ready to take on both of these unique, wacky, high-energy characters at the same time, for a whole year. But what we saw in them in Arizona is exactly what you all quickly saw in them, and what we still see in them a year later: a passion for ministry. Steve and Wesley love the Lord. They're devoted to his Word. They care about God's people, inside and outside the church. And they are dedicated to the mission of the church.

Passion for ministry. You have it (Steve), and you have it (Wesley). We need that here at Hope. And we need both of you here at Hope.

How wonderful it is for us to affirm today, as a church, that we recognize that God has called you to this important DCE ministry. We see room for growth, of course, and the need to keep learning from experience; but we see clearly how God has equipped each of you for this ministry work. We are thankful for your parents, and what you've learned from them about the faith. We appreciate your home congregations and the church workers you grew up with, who helped raise you

as Christians. We value all those college classes, field work projects, and endless papers you had to write.

But most of all, Wesley and Steve, we appreciate that you both are, just like all of us, expert sinners who have been saved by the grace of our God in Jesus Christ. Join us now, in proclaiming and living the Word and love of Christ in our community. Join us now, in carrying out the Great Commission, making disciples for Jesus, teaching and encouraging and welcoming and witnessing. Join us now, the people of Hope Lutheran Church, Wake Forest, North Carolina, in doing God's work, as full-fledged, official, called servants, Directors of Christian Education.

As we say at the end of every worship hour, "The internship is ended. The service now begins."

Steve and Wesley, go in peace, and serve the Lord. Amen!