

## Confronting Cyclops

Sterling UMC  
March 13, 2011  
Romans 5:12-21

Cyclops! Everybody knows what a Cyclops is: that strange mythological monster with one big eye in the middle of its forehead! And we think, what a bizarre creature, a Cyclops, with one big eye right *here*.

But in a way, we are all Cyclopes! Here's what I mean. What's the first thing you think about each morning? We all think to ourselves, "What am I going to do today? How will I do it? What will happen to me today? How will I feel today?" I, I, I. And all day long, what do we say to people? We say things like, "I think this" and "I think that" and "I agree" and "I disagree" and "I like this" and "I don't like that" and "I just want to say...". I, I, I. And what's the last thing that you think about at night? "I wish that so-and-so would stop doing thus-and-such to me" and "I really did a good job today" and "I wonder what I'll do tomorrow." I, I, I! Who is Number One? I am! Who is first in line? I am! Who is the most important person in the whole wide world? I am! What is at the forefront of all my thoughts? I am! If they were to open my brain and pull out the frontal lobe and extract the one biggest concept in that gray matter, what would it be? I, I, I! There is ONE GREAT BIG "I" right *here* in our heads! We are Cyclopes!

The trouble with that, of course, is that you can't see very well when you only have one eye. You're half blind. Everything looks flat and two-dimensional. You have no depth perception. The real beauty of the world is lost on you. And I'm sure you've seen it happening to people around you. Every day you see people walking around totally blind to the things around them, because they are too busy thinking. Thinking about what? I, I, I. I'll bet most of you here this morning can identify with that. Because it's so easy to get too busy focusing on your One Big I. "What am I going to have for lunch today?" "What am I going to do?" "What am I going to say?" I, I, I. All this focusing on your One Big I leaves no energy left to focus with your two eyes, and so you become blind to the real world around you.

That problem with our one big eye has a name. It is called sin. You ever notice that the word sin has that one "I" right in the middle? Our preoccupation with self, our desire to please self, our need control all of these things have their root in that one big I.

And this is a universal problem. Every one of us at one time or another has disappointed God. By things we have done. Or by things that we should have done. But didn't do. We all struggle. There is a gap between what we want to be and who we really are. You know what I'm talking about? There is a discrepancy between what we appear to be to other people and what we know ourselves to be. That gap is called sin.

Here are some examples. Maybe you have heard some of them, or maybe even used them yourself:

- I know God says we should not commit adultery BUT. . I'm really in love!
- I know God wants me to forgive BUT . . . I want to seek revenge!
- I know God says sex is for marriage BUT . . . I have desires!
- I know God tells us to be kind and tenderhearted BUT . . . I just don't like that person.
- I know God tells me not to cheat or steal BUT ... I really want it, I really need it, and I believe I am entitled.

The apostle Paul expresses this in Romans 7. You can feel the emotion in his words as he talks about his I problem: "I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing... what a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"

This is not a new problem. Since the beginning of time humankind has confronted Cyclops. It is as old as history itself. It began all the way back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Confronted with the temptation to partake of the one thing they were told to avoid gave in to the one-eyed monster and ate the forbidden fruit, and from that day forward sin has reigned in this world. Since that day we have been controlled by the one-eyed Cyclops, sin. And we have suffered the consequences. And what is the consequence? Death. As our Scripture passage from Romans 5 says, "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned."

So what is the solution? Is there any hope in our battle? Is there a way that we can win when confronting Cyclops?

In Greek mythology, the Cyclops was killed when they took his own sword and ran it through his one big eye, *\*chxchxchx!\**. Well, guess what? That is what the season of Lent reminds us about.

During this holy and sacred season we pause to remember what Jesus did – he came into our world, and took all of the sins of the world and placed them on himself. On the cross he suffered the consequences, didn't he. That condemnation that should have been mine – that's what Jesus suffered when he went to the cross. With one bold stroke the Cyclops is vanquished when the "I" is crossed out. The punishment that I should have received is taken by Jesus. Instead of us being condemned for our sins, Jesus is condemned instead.

There was once a movie called the Last Emperor. The young child is anointed as the last emperor of China and lives a life of luxury with 1000 servants at his command. "What happens when you do wrong?" his brother asks. "When I do wrong, someone else is punished," the boy replies. Then he demonstrates, by breaking a jar, and one of

his servants is beaten. In Christianity, Jesus reverses that ancient pattern. When the servants (that's us) make a mistake, the King is punished. That's how it works. Instead of us being condemned eternally for our sins, Jesus is condemned instead.

That's the solution to our "I" problem. That's the solution to the problem of sin and death! We read in our Scripture lesson for the morning: "Just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification for all men." Because of what Jesus did, you are justified in the eyes of God. God looks at you and says, "Not guilty!"

Adam's sin was the worst mistake in human history. But what Jesus did – his death on the cross – that is the best thing that has ever happened in human history. The single most important event in the history of the world – right here – Jesus taking on our sin and dying on the cross. How many people are affected by this? Billions. Our text goes on to say: "Just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." God offers this solution to all people. Because of one man, Jesus Christ, and what he did, all who believe are made righteous in the eyes of God.

Do you see how this can change your life, right now? It is true, that in the eyes of God, our world is one big ground zero, because of all the sin and death that is here. And it is true that we as Christians will continue to have problems, because of the world in which we live. We'll still physically die. But now, because of what Jesus Christ has done, things can be different for you.

Now, you can be someone who has hope, someone who has peace. You can be someone who has confidence. When you think of death, whether it's the death of a loved one, or your own death, you no longer have to be afraid or confused. You no longer have to worry about condemnation for your sins. You can be someone who has peace, because you know that God will welcome you into heaven after you die. Your sins have been taken away.

You no longer have to wonder about the purpose of your life. Jesus has changed all that. Your purpose is to learn more about the God who has saved you. Your purpose is to help others in this world, to help others to find Christ that they too might have the same comfort that you have.

When you face all the problems that come your way, you no longer have to feel pressure to fix everything yourself. You no longer have to feel despair that life is helpless and hopeless, that you're on your own. It's no longer I, I, I. You can feel peace and confidence, because you know that God will strengthen you and guide you. He has proven this to you by his death on the cross for your sins.

My prayer is that during Lent we won't focus on our One Big I but will look outwards with our two real eyes, and focus on God. To see people and things not through the one big I, but through God's eyes. Look out and see the beauty of God's creation! Look out

and see the need around us. Look out and see God's love, God's power and God's presence all around us. Take that "I" at the front of your mind and cross it out! They used to call this "self denial" and "self mortification". I like to think of it as killing the Cyclops!

This morning we will be closing our service by celebrating Holy Communion. As you come forward to receive the elements I want you to look up here behind me and see the cross. Take a good look and you will see that it is really a crossed-out "I".

Take a look and as you do say to yourself these words of the apostle Paul, "It is no longer I who live ... but Christ who lives in me."