

Lent I Psalm 25:7
Do not remember the sins of my youth

Pastor Christoph Schulze, St. Paul's and St. Matthew's, Brooklyn

"Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love, for they have been from of old." (Psalm 25:7)

Ah, the "sins of our youth!" Perhaps we blush to remember them. Robust, bold, and fleshly sins, with remarkable power to hurt and haunt. Sins of ego, and a youthful, untouchable exuberance. Days and nights of ecstatic degradation. Youthful vows too hastily made, and spectacularly broken: marriage promises, confirmation promises, promises to parents, shattered. Sins that make us learn painfully the truth of what the Apostle wrote: ***"He who sins sexually sins against his own body."*** (I Corinthians 6:18). Years and years of living in ***"...a distant country..."*** (Luke 15:18), running mightily, through smoke and empty bottle, from the Father who, we now realize with thanks, never stopped reminding us, in so many ways, that He *was* always home for us. Maybe, with me, you can say of those youthful sins, "been there, done that." Lent is, in fact, one very good time to say that, loud and clear.

Can a *District* have such sins? We will perhaps allow that organizations, too, are not exempt from the excesses of a youthful exuberance. Regardless of how big or little the congregation or District, the truth is that the Enemy always has a field day with our ethnocentrism and egoisms. How easy for *any* group to take our Lord's gloriously wide-open ***"all nations"*** (Matthew 28:19) and make it ***"our nation"*** -- and what a poor shadow of the original call that becomes. What need to reach *out* when the ships are hauling *in* congregations entire with each passing week? How easy to ignore the "other" when our gyms are full and the classrooms are bursting with our "parochial school" children. How easy and convenient -- through the haze of paperwork, conferences, and bureaucratic busy-ness -- to forget that by the power of the Holy Spirit the message goes out -- must go out -- not only to Jerusalem, but all Judea. And Samaria. And ***"to the ends of the earth."*** (Acts 1:8) Everyone. All nations. Even the people who don't speak German. Even the ones who don't speak English so well. Sins of our youth, sins of exuberance and a youthful, organizational ego -- sins with a remarkable power to hurt and haunt.

The sins of our youth. Such sins (like the sometimes more insidious sins of our middle-age and later years), find their rightful place at the feet of the Master who told a woman about to be nailed for some perhaps "youthful" sins of her own: ***"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin."*** (John 8:11) How she must flown away that day, liberated from the rock-throwers! How she must have flown away that day, knowing that she was no longer slave to the sins which had nearly killed her.

We have the same liberation, when by power of the Holy Spirit we realize that Jesus not only knows our sins, but that he was willing to cover them with his precious blood. They are gone. Instead of a cloud of guilt, the Redeemer crafts a rainbow of grace over us, reminding us that the hated sin is gone, but the sinner remains, and is loved.

"Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the infinitely precious baptismal rainbow which hangs over your people. Help us to sincerely repent of our sins -- the sins of our youth, and our fresher ones. And, help us, by your Spirit, to do what you call us to do, Lord Jesus! Amen.

-Christoph Schulze