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Sin in the city

Three teenage boys are shot to death in broad daylight and our city barely sighs.” (*Chicago Sun Times*, Tuesday, February 24) We’re still reeling from weeks and weeks of the Governor Blagojevich mess. Every few months new wisps of scandal related to Cook County and/or the City of Chicago emerge.

A few weeks ago, I come home from an out-of-town meeting. My street is barricaded by more police and emergency vehicles than I can count. I find out later a man had barricaded himself with hostages in a nearby house. Of this I am sure, on any given day there is way more sin in my city that I don’t know about than I do know about.

Sin is repugnant to God and destructive to man. The question is not, “Is one a sinner?” but rather, “What is the manifestation of a person’s sinful nature?” Let’s face it, there is a whole lot of sin that is of a “neater and cleaner” variety. Embezzlement in a corporation has its impact, but on its face it’s not nearly as humanly horrific as a rape.

The wages of sin is death. Sin kills stuff! Truth and trust, relationships, communication, unity and harmony, peace, and ultimately civilization. What happens when you have hundreds of thousands of sinners or millions of sinners in a confined space? Is it not safe to say that the spiritual effect of each sinful nature interacting with other sinful natures in a confined space would produce a more dynamic and dramatic spiritual effect?

Perhaps you are more quickly able to think of the social impact of the

sinful nature. Clearly the social impact is more readily seen. What, then, is the result of many sinners confined to a small area? Isn’t it reasonable to conclude that the manifestations of those sin natures will be greater in number and intensity? More sinners per square foot. More sin per square foot. More spiritual death per square foot. More guilt, arrogance, pain, denial, depression, rebellion, suffering, seared conscience per square foot.

Throw a single pebble into a farm pond. You get a “kerplunk” and gentle ripples. Picture that “kerplunk” as the impact of one sinner in a lightly populated area. Now envision a front-end loader full of boulders rumbling up to the pond’s edge and dumping. The water boils, roils, and churns. There are waves and whirlpools. You see the difference? More sin in the same space brings a radically different reality. Spiritually and socially, the impacts of sin constantly disrupt the peace, the stillness, and the holiness until there is no peace, there is no stillness, and there is no holiness. There is constant hostility, disruption, anger, pain, confusion, chaos.

So many sinful natures expressing themselves in a confined space contribute to a social structure that is looser, less restrictive, and less clear. It creates an atmosphere to which sinners are drawn. Scammers come here to scam. Conmen come here to con. Lust mongers come here precisely because there is a higher level of tolerance and a greater degree of vulnerability. Ironically, there is power to be had by those who can exploit other

people’s weakness.

Now, add the spiritual reality of the principalities and powers. If Satan’s mission is to thwart the plans of God which center on saving sinners, wouldn’t it be reasonable to conclude there are more demons per square foot in a metropolitan area than there are in the corn fields of Iowa or the ranch lands of Texas. Satan deploys demons as his emissaries. Surely he focuses his energy strategically. Of course, then, cities are places of darkness, bondage, and oppression.

How does all of this play out in one’s personal reality? There is relentless noise, pervasive dirt, a breakneck pace, stress, fear, anxiety, time pressure. The urbanite is assaulted 24/7, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically by the very atmosphere surrounding him. His defenses are up instinctively. He is reflexively distrustful and internal calluses are more common than not.

Emotional and physical weariness from interacting with all of the above and a spiritual weariness from an unrelenting fierce battle is a very real impact on urban spiritual leaders and the people they seek to serve. The toll on the life and health of a church, the longevity of ministry, and the continuity of ministry in urban areas is unmistakable.

Sinners are real. Sin is real. The results, impact and influence of sin is real. Jesus said, “I did not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” “Where sin abounds.....” Jesus is real. Jesus is the answer. Jesus is mighty to save. Yes, in the city.