

Chipping Away!

Scripture: Ezekiel 18:25 – 32

May 7th, 2023

On my wife's and my trip to Europe several years ago, we started our journey through Europe in Rome. While in Rome, we visited Vatican City. Our trip gave us special passes to avoid the crowds so when we got to the Vatican, we passed all the people in line and got in right when it opened. During our visit of Vatican City, we toured the Sistine Chapel. Let me share some information about the Sistine Chapel.

In 1508 Pope Julius II wanted to do something with the Sistine Chapel. This is the Chapel located in Vatican City. It is the holiest of churches in the Catholic faith. Within the Sistine Chapel many Pope's are buried and Pope Julius II wanted to adorn the church in some way. He decided to commission someone to paint the ceiling of the Chapel. Pope Julius II met with his advisors and they gave the Pope many names of men that they thought capable to do a great job. The Pope decided upon commissioning Michelangelo. But Michelangelo did not want the job! Michelangelo was a sculptor, not a painter. He begged the Pope to have someone else paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The Pope insisted that Michelangelo do the job and for four years Michelangelo worked on the ceiling of the Chapel. It took Michelangelo four years to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel!

The process came with a number of challenges which included crouching in strange position to work on the ceiling for many hours at a time. Michelangelo developed a severe back problem and he often would have to take a break to give his back a rest.

When I visited the Sistine Chapel, I got a neck pain from tilting my head back to look at the ceiling. I know how Michelangelo felt!

One of Michelangelo's chief concerns came from the nature of painting the ceiling. Michelangelo did a fresco on the ceiling. A fresco is a technique of mural painting executed with freshly laid plaster. Water is mixed with a pigment to the plaster to produce color for a mural. When you make a mistake on a fresco, it is not like painting where you just paint over your mistake.

When you make a mistake on a fresco, you must hammer away at the plaster to fix it. You must remove the offending image before replacing it with the corrected image.

This process is called 'pentimento'. 'Pentimento' is related to the word for 'repent' so in some way to fix a fresco one must repent the mistake made in the fresco.

We need the process of pentimento. We need to repent our mistakes. We need to hammer at our mistakes made in life. We need the process of pentimento.

Each Sunday in worship I offer up a morning prayer which has in it a prayer of confession and it seeks God's forgiveness for our sins and shortcomings.

I must admit that the morning prayer are often read to you with not much intensity. I feel it is the weakest part of our Sunday worship. I am often distracted by others things in my life or in the service and I do the morning prayer like a wet noodle.

I wonder if we have lost the edginess of confession and repentance? Human nature is to resist grace because grace changes us and change is painful.

I really love this metaphor of pentimento - chipping away at plaster to fix a fresco. Oh, we would much rather paint over our brokenness than to hammer away at it. We would much rather just gloss things over then let the shards of sin gather at our feet. We would rather just touch up around the edges than pound away at our sins and transgressions letting our sins fall away from us.

Maybe what we need is a little pentimento in our lives? Let us hammer away at our mistake. Let us pound away our transgressions. Let us remove the offending pieces and replace them with the grace of God.

Let us pray:

God, who makes all things new, help us not to shy away from the hard work of transformation. Help us to not paint over our sinful nature but let us hammer away at our sins so that they no longer are part of our being. Give us the process of pentimento in our lives.

You are the master artist - pentimento each of us! AMEN.