

**Text:** [Psalm 14 \(CEB\)](#)

**Date:** July 28, 2024

**Title:** “What’s Wrong with People?”

**Theme:** We can’t pretend what’s wrong with “people” isn’t also wrong with us.

1

I’ve said it a thousand times  
And I feel certain you’ve said it too  
Now, honestly, my version typically includes an expletive in it  
somewhere  
(At least when I’m not in the pulpit)  
“What’s WRONG with people?”

You read an outrageous political post on social media  
Especially now, in this wild election year

You hear about someone going ballistic on a minimum wage  
worker in a coffee shop, or at a restaurant, for no reason

You get upset because everywhere you look, it seems like people  
with money and power are able to get away with a whole lot  
of stuff

Or maybe it’s something minor on a local Facebook page that you  
think wouldn’t have happened when YOU were growing up –  
someone stealing a kid’s bike from in front of the Wawa

Then again, maybe it’s much bigger  
Like when you hear news that reminds you of how far we still  
have to go on our way to freedom, even in 2024  
When you watch the video of Sonya Massey – an unarmed  
woman shot in her own home

What’s wrong with people?  
Honestly, I’m starting to think that’s the question of our age

## 2

Now, you heard the scripture this morning:

“The Lord looks down from heaven on humans

To see if anyone is wise

To see if anyone seeks God,

But ALL OF THEM HAVE TURNED BAD.

EVERYONE is corrupt.

No one does good – not even ONE person!”

(Psalm 15:2-3, CEB)

Wouldn't you agree that this is just “What's wrong with people?”  
phrased a different way?

It's frustration to the point of exasperation

So we're not alone in feeling this

The biblical writers already wrestled with this question a couple  
thousand years ago!

## 3

I often wonder if there isn't something about this feeling of  
exasperation that's LESS a product of our times and MORE  
a product of being human

It's not unusual for folks to look back on when they were kids and  
think those times were simpler and gentler

Is that just because when we were growing up, our parents did  
their best to shield us from the harshness of the world?

I mean, we were kids – so OF COURSE the world didn't seem so  
heavy to us then!

But even so, I don't always buy that things were that much kinder  
or gentler

I mean, I seem to recall when I was growing up in the 80s that  
hospitals opened their X-ray machines on Halloween so  
parents could scan their kids candy for razor blades  
What's wrong with people?!

I guess my point here isn't to say we *shouldn't* feel frustrated  
But to maintain a bit of perspective  
The world is messed up, yes, it's falling apart  
But it's *always* been messed up, it's *always* been falling apart

No one can read the Bible and reach the conclusion that the world  
then was LESS violent than it is now  
It's true that we've enhanced our capability for inflicting MORE  
violence, MORE quickly  
Technology makes it so much easier for us to hurt people

#### 4

And what's true in terms of guns and bombs is even more true in  
terms of social media  
We can indulge our worst instincts from the comfort of our homes  
And gain millions of followers doing it  
We can hide behind our keyboards and never even share our  
names if we don't want to!  
Or, we can go the other direction and use angry social media to  
fuel a bid for public office

I read a story recently about a family that had created a small  
business selling swim apparel for kids on Amazon  
They were doing great  
In fact, Mom and Dad quit their jobs to run the business  
Until something happened

One day, a parent decided to return a swim diaper that had  
been...well, used

They just took it off their kid, put it in a box, and sent it back  
So, yes, “what’s wrong with people?” absolutely applies here

Now Amazon, being Amazon, inundated with thousands upon  
thousands of returns  
And having minimal regard for the reputation of a literal Mom-and-  
Pop selling on their site  
Took the diaper and its contents back, no question, and shipped it  
out to another customer  
Again, “what’s wrong with people?”

Naturally, the recipient of the dirty diaper wrote a scathing review  
on Amazon  
So they made their personal take on “what’s wrong with people?”  
very public

And guess what?  
As person after person clicked the button that said “this review  
was helpful”, it got pushed to more and more people  
A self-reinforcing cycle of negativity  
Until the business tanked<sup>1</sup>  
And what had been a family’s bread-and-butter became a  
nightmare – through no fault of their own

Isn’t this basically where we are?  
Trapped in a self-reinforcing cycle of negativity?  
Trapped in a doom loop?

It’s true on social media  
It’s true in our politics  
It’s true in every fraught relationship with a family member or  
colleague  
Where we go snub-for-snub and insult-for-insult  
It’s all a doom loop that gets us nowhere

## 5

There's a category of people that the psalms talk about as "fools"  
You may know this first verse in today's scripture by heart:  
"Fools say in their hearts, there is no God."

And we are tempted to read that as an argument against atheism  
as a philosophical stance  
In other words, it's foolish NOT to believe

But that's not really what's meant here  
Because the Bible isn't about modern philosophical perspectives  
The Bible is first and foremost about how we live  
The assumption of the biblical writers is that God IS, whether you  
choose to believe it or not, God IS

So fools are those who live like God doesn't exist  
And in particular, like God doesn't see  
Like God doesn't care  
Like God isn't paying attention to how we treat others

"Are they dumb?"  
That's what the psalmist wants to know  
Because to believe – really believe - means to understand  
Going clear back to Genesis 1  
That we are ALL created in God's image  
And if that's true, if we're all created in the image of God,  
Then how can we keep treating each other like garbage?

## 6

So let me ask you this:  
We all say it, I know – or at least we all think it  
But isn't the question "What's wrong with people?" a bit  
problematic?

Do you see where I'm going?  
When we ask the question, aren't we pretending that what's  
wrong with people isn't also wrong with us?

Here's the reality, friends:  
the problem with "people" is also the problem with us  
That's Paul's point when he quotes this psalm in Romans:  
"No one does good – not even one person!"

We are all made in the same image  
And also subject to the same sin  
The sin of THINKING WE KNOW BETTER

We live like God doesn't hear us when we say that thing about the  
person we can't stand  
Like God doesn't see when we ignore them, or mistreat them, or  
set them aside

And "What's wrong with people?" leads us directly down that road  
Because it puts me in the position where I know better  
What that question does is attempt to justify whatever negative  
thing comes out of my mouth next

I have yet to hear myself or anyone else  
say "what's wrong with people?"  
and then follow it up with something positive and uplifting  
Now, you know that's true

**7**

But we don't end a doom loop of insult for insult and hurt for hurt  
with the thinking that got us there  
We don't end the doom loop until someone is brave enough to  
step out of it  
And do the thing that God calls us to do

Which is not to react to people out of disgust, or fear  
Or frustration or exasperation  
But out of love  
Knowing that we too are made in the image of God  
And knowing that we too are subject to the same fatal flaws that  
Jesus came to redeem

So this week, the challenge is step out of the doom loop  
Don't use "what's wrong with people" as an excuse to lean into  
the negative  
Don't answer insult for insult or snub for snub

Instead, in the words of the psalm:  
"let salvation come out from Zion!"

What I mean, is:  
Don't be afraid to speak the word of hope  
the word of kindness  
the word of compassion  
because those are the words of salvation

This week:  
Don't be afraid to say what's right  
Instead of asking what's wrong

Amen.

**by Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-15/how-bad-amazon-review-destroyed-beau-belle-littles-swim-diaper-business?embedded-checkout=true>