A few years ago a book was published with the title, The Joy of Sex. It was a best seller, even though it had only drawings but lacked photos. It also had print, for those who were interested in reading. A few years later came, The Joy of Cooking, The Joy of Running and other joy books. The cooking book did have photos, and some of its pictures created a lust for food that was sinful.

This message is on the joy of blame. Blame has a life of its own that neither sex nor cooking can match. Consider the comparisons. Sex generally is limited to the bedroom and cooking to the kitchen, but you can blame folks in any room of the house, on the roof, in the yard. You don’t even need a house. Blame can happen anytime and anywhere.

With sex, you know the other person. If you are a Christian you know them in the commitment called marriage. And home cooking is for family and friends, at home. You know them and they know you. With blame, you don’t need to know the other person or group. It’s more fun if you don’t know them. Whole peoples and cultures can fall under the blame axe without formal introduction.

If you have a problem with sex, you can consult a therapist. If you need help with cooking, professional chefs stand ready. For blame, professionals are not needed. Granted, there is a profession given to the art of blame. They are called lawyers. Will Rogers said, “If it weren’t for lawyers, we wouldn’t need them.” I, of course, exclude the fine attorneys and judges who are part of this church. That said, we don’t need lawyers. The less expertise we have, the more fun it is. Blame is the most fun when everyone is clueless and no one has the facts.

Blame has a long history. During the Civil War Congress put together “The Joint Committee for the Conduct of the War.” Its real purpose was to blame someone, anyone for whatever was going wrong or not sufficiently right in the war. Some historians think the main impact of this committee was to lengthen the war by a year, since those doing the fighting not only had to worry about the Confederates shooting at them from the front but the congressmen taking potshots from the rear.

After Pearl Harbor a commission was formed to assign blame. The Watergate committee was formed to find out ‘what did they know and when did they know it?’ The Iran Contra committee in the 1080’s was formed to look for who to blame. The post 9-11 committee was formed in theory to improve national security but in fact it often became a contest on who can blame what on whom. Sean Connery said in the movie, “Rising Sun,” “fix the problem, not the blame.” That’s no fun at all. After all, why do you they think they call it the ‘blame game?’ Anyone can play it and you never run out of targets because, as they also say, ‘there’s always enough blame to go around.’

There is joy in blame; assigning it, defining it, pinning it on others, passing it around. There is something about it that makes us feel better about ourselves. We aren’t the ones to blame. He or she or they are the evil doers. Blame doesn’t make us perfect but it does make us feel superior to others, more noble than…them. To blame is not to focus on who is responsible for some wrong deed with the intent of fixing the problem. To blame is to focus on assigning
guilt, pointing the finger, rather than holding out the hand. To blame is to pass judgment on the worth of the person, not simply their actions good or bad.

Why talk about this subject on my next to next to last sermon? The reason is simple. Left unchecked, this quality can ruin a friendship, a marriage, a business, a church or a faith. Its power to destroy far exceeds the pleasure it offers for the moment. It is a deep expression of dangerous pride, for do you notice how blame is always about ‘you’ but seldom about ‘me’?

With the long history of blame and all the joy in assigning it, something odd emerges from the Bible. The word ‘blame’ is found 3 times in the whole book. The opposite term, ‘blameless,’ is found over 50 times. In the Bible what matters is not assigning blame or knowing who to blame but rather the condition or state of being blameless. That’s not as much fun. To think about blame is to think about others. “Blameless” is a quality that shifts the focus, and the finger-pointing, back to self. We are forced to consider what is getting in the way of having that quality in our lives. It’s more fun to ‘round up the usual suspects’ than to become the usual suspect.

In Philippians 2, Paul writes: Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” In 1 Thessalonians 5 he writes: And may the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole body and soul and spirit be preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other verses the emphasis is the same. God calls us to become blameless before him and before others in our integrity of living.

The quality of blamelessness reflects the character of Christ being formed in you and me. This is not spiritual paranoia or an excuse to wallow in guilt because none are perfect. It flows from a life in the process of sanctification, becoming holy and more like Jesus as we walk with him each day. This is not ‘holier than thou-ness’ but the true release that comes from a life given to Christ. Others enjoy being around such a person, for all the right reason.

Here is where the paradox of the Gospel hits home. The only way to become blameless before God is by...accepting the blame. The path to freedom is shouldering the responsibility. Accept blame for what? Isaiah 53 tells us: He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquity. Romans 5 tells us: God showed his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 1 Peter 2 reminds us: He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

The point is clear. Our sin, yours and mine, sent Christ to the cross. Our estrangement from God is real and deep and nothing we can do can jump the chasm between a holy God and our blame-happy carnal souls. Of course we also do good. We love but mostly those who love us. We forgive, but mainly those who forgive us. We share, but mostly with those who can repay. In short, we really are ‘sinners,’ ‘for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23). God, in Christ, has redeemed us, giving his only son to live and die for us, for ‘the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord’ (Romans 6:23).

In accepting the blame for Jesus’ death we open the door for forgiveness through that atoning death. In taking the blame we find the inner character of blamelessness as God’s gift of grace. In shouldering the load, we find the load lifted by the risen Son of God. The blame game loses its appeal. As those released from blame, we find ourselves able to release ourselves and others from the endless trap that always is the prize for those who play a blame game. We are easier to live with, which includes living with ourselves. Relationships, faith, life itself is refreshed by freedom and peace as only a ‘blameless’ life can do.
There is joy in blame. It can be fun, exciting and oh so sweet. But there is far more joy in leaving the blame game behind and living in the freedom of the forgiveness of Christ. To know this truth you must drop the blame game. The only place you can drop it, where it stays put, is at the foot of the cross. Amen.