

Lenten Midweek #4 – 2024
+ Repentance and Confession +
Proverbs 28:1-14
1 John 1:1-10

There is no sin apart from a sinner. Man commits sin. Sin is committed by someone. God has said that sin is to be punished. God is just. “When Christ suffered and died, He was being judged and sentenced to death by God in our place, but when God the Father raised Jesus up again, who was it that God was acquitting in the person of Christ?” (C.F.W. Walther). It was you, wasn’t it? When Jesus was raised, you were the one acquitted; it was you who was set free it was you who was pronounced innocent. Sin was judged in Christ. His bloody cross, His enormous suffering is testament to the radical judgment that our sins deserve. Your sin and the Holy Son of God were fused. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). And He was raised. So, who was given the verdict of “not guilty” when Jesus was raised from the dead? “Christ needed no acquittal for Himself. No one could charge Him with a single sin. Tell me then, who was being justified when the Lord Christ strode out of the tomb on Easter? Who was being declared holy and innocent as the Son of God rose triumphant from the tomb?” (C.F.W. Walther). It was you. It was me. When God said to His Son, “you shall live,” that pronouncement referred to us. His life is our life. His acquittal is our acquittal. His resurrection is our resurrection.

That is precisely what it means when the pastor absolves you of your sin on Sunday morning. Tonight we have progressed to the dynamic of Repentance and Confession. We have followed a spiritual trail of bread crumbs in regard to repentance. It begins with the truth. God reveals the truth to us regarding what sin is, where it resides, and what sin deserves. This revelation comes by His Holy Word, by His Holy Spirit. The truth makes an impact on us. It is certainly possible for people to reject the truth. It happens all of the time. But the truth also gives rise to honesty. Regardless of how the truth makes us feel, how it makes us look, truth gives rise to honesty. Believers are honest. Faith is affirming that what God has said to us in His Word is true. Faith embraces the truth. Faith is born of the stunning reality that God has sent His Son to reconcile the world to Himself. Faith sees the sacrifice of Christ for what it is. Faith sees the love of God embedded in His crucified Son. Faith will always put God above self. Faith will always put truth above deception. Faith gives way trust. Christian trust can be defined as the complete reliance on God’s grace and God’s guidance. The greater the trust the easier it is to confess one’s sins; honestly, sincerely, thoroughly confess one’s sins.

I suspect that we have all known the terrors; terrors of conscience come upon those who are confronted by their misdeeds, confronted by the darkness in our hearts that gives rise to those misdeeds. Our sinful nature still clings to us. No matter how much you may wish that it weren’t so, no matter how much you view yourself positively compared to the “heathen” of the world, no matter how many good works you do, you still have a sinful nature, a corrupt heart, a defiant and prideful disposition. The corporate confession of sins is pretty explicit in this regard. “I, a poor, miserable sinner.” Yep; you, me, the guy next to you, the ones who say it and the ones who don’t; poor miserable sinners who deserve God’s temporal wrath and eternal punishment. One of the dangers of the corporate confession of sins is that it’s not specific. It can’t be. The confession is a generic one. But sin isn’t generic, is it? Jesus didn’t die for a hazy set of

offenses that no one can really identify. That *specific* lie, that *specific* adulterous act, that *specific* verbal refuse that came streaming out of your mouth which was designed to brutally wound someone – Jesus died for the specific sins of specific people – namely you and me.

The Rite for Individual Confession and Absolution in the front of your hymnal (page 292) has an opportunity for the penitent to be specific about what sins are plaguing his conscience. After a well-crafted statement meant to cover multiple bases, the one confessing says this: “what troubles me particularly is that...” That’s when specific sins are verbalized. That’s when specific sins are addressed and forgiven. In the silent time during the Sunday Divine Service, prior to the confession, where there is a long pause and everyone is to ruminate on what they’ve done to grieve God in the last week, what do you do? Do you rehearse the Ten Commandments and where you’ve broken them? Does the one really bad thing that you did stand out and you focus on that? Do you think about the people you live with whom you have treated shabbily? Can you feel God prompting you, listening to you? Does your mind refuse to rehearse your sins and you just wait for that silence to be over?

Confession and absolution is not something that God instituted for His righteousness to be achieved. Righteousness is in Christ. Confession and absolution is for you, not for Him. Repentance is the gateway to freedom. Freedom is in Christ and His forgiveness. Forgiveness is for sins, not a generic condition of feeling blah, but to relieve you of the guilt and shame and death that is the product of sin, sin which you commit. A ministry takes place here at Christ the King. It is 100% Christ’s ministry. It is a ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:16-21). The ministry of Christ is for your forgiveness, for true freedom, for communing with God and sharing in His life. You have been reconciled to God through Christ’s blood. It’s finished, achieved, completed. But you are a creature living in time. You’ve sinned since last I saw you and vice-versa. We confess it, knowing that we already belong to God but that we need, in an ongoing way NEED, to be forgiven. Our daily sins create our need. Real, specific, unhappy sins create the need for forgiveness which Christ gives us gladly, give us abundantly.

If Christianity were just a story, just a historical narrative of what happened once then the believers could just remind themselves of it once in a while and stay at home on Wednesday nights in Lent and watch Netflix. Christianity is more than a story of what happened once upon a time. Christ’s voice is living and active and we hearken to it in His Word. Christ shares His life, His holiness and we become participants in something divine as we gather in His name. He is with us, ministering to us, through Word and Sacrament, through the Gospel which saturates this holy house, through the absolution which is His blood, His resurrection applied to us directly. You are acquitted. You are a favored son, a favored daughter. Love and mercy, God’s love and God’s mercy, drip from the words of the absolution. What you confess is forgiven. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then he covered it up. How did David feel? It got worse for him, didn’t it? Covering up your sins, does that work for you? Covering up his sin led David to kill Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband.

Confession is coming into the Light (John 3:19-21). Covering up sin is to remain in the darkness (Psalm 32:3-5). Christ’s blood is pure light. The resurrection is what you trust. The resurrection is God declaring you forgiven. We are people of the light (1 Thessalonians 5:5-11). We are people of the resurrection. “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,’ and you

forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:5). Forgiveness is Christ crucified and risen.
Forgiveness reigns in this place.