

Pentecost 2 – June 6, 2021
Text: Confession/Absolution
Theme: Worship Series 2 “Wipe your Feet!”

Today we continue our sermon series on worship. Last week we heard about the Invocation where we remind ourselves whose name we carry and thus by whose authority we call the living God to be here with us. Remember that worship is really a dialogue between us and God. Imagine the invocation as ringing the doorbell outside the mansion. God has now opened the door for us but we have been walking through a filthy world, and we are about to enter his holy space. I remember my mother’s voice as clear as day. We had an old-fashioned wooden screen door with the spring on it that groaned when you opened the door. When she heard that spring groan, she would yell from wherever she was in the house, “Wipe your feet!” So, the least we can do is wipe our feet before walking into God’s house. Hence, we have the confession of sins which comes next in the Divine Service.

The confession was not a part of worship in the early church. Christians were expected to prepare themselves for worship ahead of time by coming to a confessional service before the Sunday celebration. The early Church never required confession because we believe that our Baptisms cover us with grace all of the time regardless of whether or not we confess a particular sin to a pastor

or to anyone else. Nowhere does God make confession a condition of grace. We receive grace whether we confess or not. Confession and absolution are gifts to us to help keep our faith strong so that we maintain a firm grasp of grace. It is a structured time to wash ourselves off. For instance, I am assuming all of you have regular times when you bathe. You might bathe before breakfast, or you might prefer to bathe after dinner but bathing is not a condition for eating. It is simply a time structured within your day to wash off the grime of the world.

During the Dark Ages, however, the Church began requiring confession as a condition for receiving the Lord's Supper. That of course is not right because Baptism is the only Biblical requirement for receiving the Lord's Supper. We are not called to achieve a certain level of worthiness before receiving, but rather by receiving, we grow more and more faithful. Well, this problem of treating confession as a condition for receiving was rectified by the Reformation and confession was no longer "required." Sadly, many people simply stopped doing it. In an effort to bring it back into common usage, the Church gradually brought it into the Sunday morning service.

You and I live in a sin darkened world. It is corrupted by sin and all of creation groans under the weight of that sin and looks

forward to the day the burden of sin will be lifted. As we come to our time of corporate prayer, that is, our time of worship, part of what we do is adjust to walking into the light. You know what it is like walking out of a darkened room into the bright sunlight. For a moment, we are painfully blind because our pupils have to constrict to block out enough light for us to see. Our eyes, used to the darkness, take a few minutes to adjust to the light.

Likewise, when we worship God, we come here from out of the darkened world. It takes our spiritual eyes a few minutes to adjust to the bright light in this place. It depends, of course, on the level of darkness we live in during the week. Some of us are in touch with God all the time and we hardly notice the increase of intensity at worship. However, some of us might live quite far from God during the week. Sometimes that distance is out of our control, such as the Christian student who has the theory of evolution rammed down his throat at school as though macro evolution were a proven fact, or the single parent who is forced to work 60 hours a week to provide for her children and sometimes must choose between feeding her kids or going to church. Sometimes the distance from God is of our choosing, such as the person who chooses to skip worship or Bible study altogether because something seemingly more fun has come up, or the person who looks like the model Christian on Sunday

morning and then seems to forget that God is also present with him while he is getting drunk, lusting over pornography, or gossiping about people and hurting their reputations.

Regardless of why we live in darkness or how dark our darkness is, the point is that we need a transition into the light and that is the purpose of the Confession and Absolution. It is not that your sins are unforgiven until I speak the magic words over you. Your sins were forgiven before you committed them because you are constantly surrounded by the Baptismal waters. You are washed clean as fast as you are dirtied and no sin can stick to you. When I was a kid, I used to think that I sinned all week and then when I got to church and the pastor said "in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all of your sins," then I was clean until I sinned again, which usually took about 3½ minutes. But that is not how it works. The pastor wasn't saying magic words and waving a wand around, he was simply stating the truth and reminding me of the state in which I live all the time.

A pastor's job is not to be the sin police. God did not put me on this earth to discover your sins and condemn you. Nor does he give me magic words that forgive sin in some mysterious way. If you never heard the absolution in your life, you could very easily go to

heaven because your forgiveness does not depend on any words spoken by human beings. Jesus said;

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” Jesus was sent to save the world, and it is the Pastor’s role to proclaim that salvation to all who wish to hear.

That is why in the Gospel for today, Jesus says that every sin is forgiven except blaspheming the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit is how you are brought into relationship with Jesus so that your sins are forgiven. If you reject the Holy Spirit, your faith dies and if there is no relationship with Jesus, there is no forgiveness. But if you are related to Jesus through baptism, then you are free and forgiven. So, before we do anything else in our worship, we are given the opportunity to lay down the baggage that we don’t need to be carrying around. If you are a Christian, why would you be hauling sin around? Why would you be hauling guilt around? A Christian believes that Jesus died on the cross to forgive sin. So, if Jesus died to forgive your sin, why would you need to continue worrying about it?

I know that there are some who believe that people don't pay enough attention to their sin these days. But I will tell you this. I would agree with you that people sin more openly today than they once did, but the problem is not that we need to pay more attention to sin. A sinner can study his sin all day long and get nowhere. To overcome sin, we have to focus on the Gospel, the forgiveness of sin. If people seem more sinful today than they once were, they just did a better job of hiding it in times gone by. All people have always been sinful since the fall into sin. The problem is not that we need to pay more attention to sin, but that we need to pay more attention to forgiveness. Only absolute confidence in our relationship with Christ and the forgiveness he offers empowers us to lay down our baggage, our guilt, our shame and begin living a new and a bold life in Christ.

Absolution comes from the Latin *absolvere* which is "to release from" or "set free from." When we hear the words of Absolution, the words of forgiveness that set us free from sin, we are able to let go of the baggage in our lives, and then we can more easily approach the altar. I proclaim your forgiveness, and then we begin our formal worship by singing the Entrance hymn or the Introit because only holy saints are permitted to approach the altar of God and the absolution proclaims your sainthood bought by Christ and given through the Holy Spirit.