

Confession

September 3, 2017

Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Bill Mann

Today, I want to talk to you about what is sometimes called “The Third Sacrament of the Church”—Confession. There’s a story about a young pastor—Pastor Dan—who went to visit one of the elderly members of his congregation in the hospital. Her name was Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson was recovering from surgery. Pastor Dan had had a long day—a busy day—no time to stop for lunch. As Pastor Dan visited with Mrs. Johnson, he glanced over and saw a bowl of peanuts that someone had brought her. Now, Pastor Dan loved peanuts and since he hadn’t eaten all day—without even asking, Pastor Dan reached over and slipped a few peanuts into his hand and then into his mouth. Mrs. Johnson was a talker and she went on talking and as she talked, Pastor Dan slipped a few more peanuts into his hand and into his mouth, into his hand and into his mouth, until finally Pastor Dan had finished off the entire bowl of peanuts. And Pastor Dan felt so bad about this. He knew he had to say something to Mrs. Johnson, but he was so embarrassed. Finally, as he was getting ready to leave, he said, “Mrs. Johnson, I have a confession to make: I saw your peanuts there, and I couldn’t help myself. I’m afraid I’ve eaten the whole bowl.” “That’s all right,” Mrs. Johnson replied. “I know how you feel. I love them too! The only problem is that, with my false teeth, I can’t eat them.” She said, “The only thing I can do is suck the chocolate off them.”

My first point is that confession is hard and that there is no way to know how it's going to turn out. Have you been reading the stories in the Washington Post about Father William Aitcheson? He's the Roman Catholic priest from Fairfax City who wrote a letter to his congregation confessing his involvement years ago in the Klu Klux Klan. He said the events in Charlottesville prompted his confession. It all happened years ago, when he was a student at the University of Maryland, and he had a conversion experience in college and decided to give up a life of hate. He went to the seminary and became a priest. But then it came out that he wasn't just a member of the Klu Klux Klan, he was an Exalted Cyclops—the head of the Maryland organization. He made bombs. He burned crosses. He still had an outstanding judgement against him for \$26,000 for burning a cross in the front lawn of a newlywed couple. His past was buried and he didn't write the letter until after a reporter started asking questions. Now the Arlington Diocese has transferred him to places unknown. I don't know whether we're going to hear from Father Aitcheson again.

This is our natural reaction to sin, isn't it? We want to hide sin away. We want to cover it up. Or we want to give it another name because "sin" is such a bad word. I was reading this week about the former Governor of Alabama—Robert Bentley. He resigned in April as a result of a sex scandal—messing around with one of his female staffers. That brought an end to his 50 year marriage. Now he no longer talks to his family. He hasn't even met his newest grandchild. Do you know what Governor Bentley said when he got caught? He said, "I made a mistake. Two years ago I made a mistake. I want to apologize to the people of the State of Alabama and, once again, I want to apologize to my family. I am truly sorry for my mistake and I take full responsibility." That sounds a lot like North Carolina Senator John Edwards. Do you remember his words?—"Two years ago I made a mistake, a very serious mistake that I am responsible for. I told Elizabeth about my mistake and

asked for her forgiveness. I asked God for His forgiveness.” So, it’s a mistake? Is it really a mistake? I mean, it’s a mistake is when you pour salt in your coffee instead of sugar. It’s a mistake when you accidentally turn the wrong way down a one-way street. But this is sin! Why can’t we call it what it is?

Listen to these words of another powerful politician: “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, O Lord, and done what is evil in Your sight. So You are right in Your verdict and justified when You judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:3-4) These are the words of King David. And they illustrate two important points. First, confession involves calling sin what it really is. Sin is sin—period. It’s not a mistake. And second, confession involves seeing ourselves as we really are. You and I are sinners. David says, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” There are no self-proclaimed saints in heaven—only sinners who have been forgiven. Somehow, you and I, we need to find our way to the cross. You need to see Jesus hanging there with his hands and feet pierced by nails, a crown of thorns, his body bruised and bleeding. “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” At the last moment Jesus cried out, “It is finished!” And now, open up your hands, open up your heart to receive the forgiveness Christ offers.

When you realize what Jesus did for you on the cross—when you confess to God and say, “I am a sinner”—suddenly it is much easier to forgive other people. Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” We are all sinners. We all need God’s grace and forgiveness. Have you been watching the pictures of the flooding coming out of Texas and Louisiana? Certainly there have been scenes of tragedy—flooding. But there are also scenes

of inspiration. Take a look at these images from the past week. The folks in the nursing home—rescued! Hitching a ride on a wave runner. A little girl’s inspiring note to her police officer father—“Dear Daddy, I hope you don’t get hurt. But I hope you help other people that need you more than I do. I love you!” The people of Houston putting aside their differences in order to help one another. At a time when our country is divided and torn apart by so many issues, can we learn something of God’s will for us from the people of Houston? Is there a better way?

Last week our church treasurer walked up to me after the service. He had just finished signing checks for the week. He told me, “Pastor, I really feel proud to be a part of this congregation. I just got finished signing \$25,000 worth of checks and they are all going to help people in need.” Checks for everything from the Abused Women’s Shelter to Mobile Hope (which provides housing for homeless teens in Loudoun County). Thank you for your offerings. But we have another challenge—a huge crisis in Texas as the flood waters recede. We’ll have a door offering as you leave, if you’d like to help. 100% of your gift will go to help victims of this storm. And I’d like to remind you that, one month from today, on the first Sunday in October, we’ll be packing food in the Great Room for “Stop Hunger Now” (except they’ve changed their name to “Rise Against Hunger”). 45,000 meals from this organization that we support have already been sent to Texas.

Confession—it’s a powerful thing. It heals our relationship with God. And it heals our relationships with one another. When you admit, “I too am a sinner in need of forgiveness”—that allows you to see the world and the people around you in a new way. This idea has been captured in a song by a group called “The Brilliance.” The song is called “Brother.” I hope you enjoy it. And pay special attention to the little girl handing out invitations.