

I John 1:1 “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life— 2 the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- 3 that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. 4 And these things we write to you that your joy may be full. 5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

"Inspecting Our Ranks: Our Confession of Sins"

This morning will be the second of five sermons here at the end of ordinary time this year, on how and why we worship the way that we do here at Church of the King.

We are moving through the five major elements of what we call Covenant Renewal Worship, all of which have been part of traditional Christian worship for almost two thousand years.

- **A Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **A Confession & absolution of our sins**
- **A time of Consecration of the Saints**
- **A Communion meal with our Savior**
- **A Commission to disciple the nations**

Having considered how God calls us into His presence we now turn to the confession of our sins & forgiveness: Although one will find such confession and forgiveness in the orders of worship from all corners of Christendom for the first 1800 years of church history, it has been largely lost in the Baptist, Evangelical, Charismatic and even reformed Churches here in America today.

- **We should certainly question why this has happened.**

I will return to that question after we review what we do, remembering that we are not arguing for just a return to traditional worship for tradition's sake, but rather to understand why we see such uniformity down through the centuries:

- **Our desire is to understand how the Bible informs us about the right worship of our God.**

When we do, there is a natural flow to what happens during the worship service and the flow is reflecting the covenantal patterns that we see in all of the Bible. *[mention study material]*

God first calls us into His presence and we respond with a song of adoration and a salutation that affirms that we are coming before the one true, Triune God of Creation.

- **At this point we have a problem and need God's gracious help.**
- **We have the same problem that we often see other Saints in the Scriptures have as they are brought into God's presence in the Bible:**

Isaiah is taken before the very throne of God and he cries out, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.”

This is not the cry of a wicked person thrust before our Holy God; but rather God’s faithful prophet! It is the same with the Prophet Ezekiel who when brought before God proclaims, “I fell on my face.” And this is also what we see in the New Testament when the Apostle John comes before the risen Jesus on the Lord’s Day: “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.”

- Now these verses should be very familiar because we often use them to introduce our time of confession and forgiveness in the worship service.
- Even as redeemed sinners we are humbled when we come into the presence of Almighty God and need to be reminded how and why we are forgiven & clothed with the righteousness of Jesus so we are thus able to stand before our Holy God.

We are reminded of this need with a reading from the Scriptures and then we sing a hymn of confession together remembering our need and that Jesus is our gracious Savior!

After our hymn we take time for individual and corporate confession of sin: Here is where we practice the great truths that we read this morning from the first letter of John: We have been called into the presence of our Holy Triune God, and John rightly points out our problem:

6 “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

- Which of us was able to come here this morning declaring they did not walk in any darkness this week?

Now if we use the standard of righteousness from the world, or even what some churches use, we might be able to get by: We may have avoided the REALLY big sins like murder or adultery!

But did we keep the commandments on either side of the “big” ones?

- Honor your parents and do not covet?

What honest confession considers is more like the list of sins that Paul presents at the end of Romans...

- You know, the one that we always use to beat up on those really bad sinners like sodomites in the world...

Paul says men are, “filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness... *[oops how did that slip in here]*, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, *[envy & murder right next to each other!]* strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, *[guess all that gossip might be serious]* haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, *[sorry kids you don’t get a pass]*

31 undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.”

Now I want you to notice two important points that Paul makes there at the end of this long list which show why we must be very serious about the confession of sins:

- He does NOT say SOME of these things are deserving of death... ALL of them deserve death because ALL sin is serious!
- Paul also argues that if we do not avoid and condemn such things, then we approve of them!
- Honest confession demonstrates our disapproval of these sins!

There is only one way for us to properly approach our Holy God and that is through the blood of Jesus! John next reminded us why we need, even as forgiven sinners, a time of proper confession...

8 “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

- During our time of confession, silently or corporately, we are NOT telling God anything that He does not already know!

Driving this home a 3rd time John says in verse 9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

- By faith we know our sins were forgiven when Jesus declared ‘it is finished’ from the Cross, was raised in power from the dead and ascended to God’s right hand!
- However, we experience the forgiveness of sins each time we obey John’s call to confess our sins, something we should do often!
- When we gather together for worship, we also have the opportunity to confess our corporate sins together before God.

In our time of individual confessing, here in the service or at any other time we must simply be honest...

- No making excuses for our actions, like I was tired or sick.
- No blame shifting, which we learned well from our first parents: “The woman YOU gave me...”
- No comparison confessions, thinking what I did was not so bad compared to what someone else has done.
- Be serious, remembering, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Here again, we come face to face with a simple question as we did last week when asked if we really believe that God is calling us into His presence?

- Here we confront the sometimes troubling question of whether God has really forgiven my sins...
- Some of us have very grievous sins in our past and always wonder if God could really forget all that...
- Some of us have struggles with particular sins that seem to come back week after week wondering if God can once again forgive us.
- Some of us may have suddenly fallen into some grave sin unexpectedly and thus question whether we were ever saved at all.

- Thus, we must believe that Jesus forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness!

After confessing our individual sins, we then we pray a corporate prayer of confession together: This is a prayer and we pray it together! *[young children too!]*

After we have honestly confessed our sins we hear an officer in Christ’s Church proclaim Good News with a Scripture and the absolution!

- The Bible teaches that we are forgiven in Jesus and the Scriptures and the minister now proclaim this truth! And we believe in faith!

Please note that in giving the absolution, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ Jeff or I as ordained Elders are simply declaring the truth of God’s Word!

- We are forgiven because God declares we are forgiven and that is a great comfort to His people!

After that absolution we sing our song of ascension with responses that are intended to help us demonstrate this reality each week: The words are a Trinitarian paraphrase of Psalm 134 set to some of Amber Fisher's beautiful music and I always pray it is a very special time for all of us during in the service and not just routine.

It reminds us that we are to come boldly before the throne of grace:

"Come bless the Father, all you servants of the Son, who stand by the Spirit in the House of the Lord..."

We are responding to God's call and now as forgiven sinners who are IN Christ, in the power of the Spirit, we can stand before our Holy God:

"Lift up your hands to the Holy place and bless your God!" *[and yes we lift up our hands!]*

In the Old Covenant, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies and then only once a year with blood to represent the great sacrifice Jesus would make.

- Now we can stand as a nation of priests before His Holy face, and know that God Himself is blessed as we stand before Him in the righteousness of His Son Jesus!

And as we gather for God to renew His covenant He graciously responds and thus the Psalmist declares: "May the Lord bless you from Zion, He who made heaven and earth!"

- Our hands shift to receive blessings from God and our minds try to grasp the wonder of Him who made heaven and earth wanting to bless us!

This creator is the God who we serve and He loves to bless His people! May we always come ready and properly prepared to stand before the God who has shown us such great mercy...

- Remembering the richness of what the Apostle Paul taught the young Ephesian church:

Ephesians 2:19 "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

I want to now return to the question of why it is so important that we have this time of confession & forgiveness in the service...

Just as our salutation in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit confirms our Trinitarian worship each week...

- This time of confession and forgiveness preaches the Gospel, the Good News that Jesus came to save His people from their sins each and every week!

It is Good News that comforts the Sheep and it is Good News that also confronts unrepentant sinners!

- We certainly want to be friendly, open and inviting to unbelievers who need Jesus, hoping and encouraging them to attend worship.

But proper worship will at times make them uncomfortable...

- The reality is that being confronted by their sin will and should make them uncomfortable!
- Our prayers should always be that the lost would be moved by seeing the people of God honestly confessing their sins & receiving forgiveness as the Good News is proclaimed!

And finally, if we are right to argue that a time of confession and forgiveness is an important part of right worship then it should show up somewhere in the services of churches who faithfully preach the Gospel and believe the Bible!

- **In some churches a Gospel call to repent and believe is preached week after week as the major point of the sermon: We will consider why this can be a problem next week.**

Many evangelical churches will end the service with an altar call to come and confess their sins and receive Jesus...

- **Calls that often stretch out to almost everyone in the congregation!**

And sadly, the proper time of confession is often moved to the Lord's Table where there is a felt need to make sure we are all worthy to come into the presence of God...

- **Something that should have been dealt with closer to the beginning of the service.**

A part of the service that is necessary if we are responding to God's call to enter into His holy presence... Confessing our sins and receiving absolution also relates to one of the most sobering parables that Jesus told about a great marriage feast the master called in Matthew 22 and I will leave it mostly as your homework.

There is a call [yes, you can think call to worship] that goes out to the highways and byways for all to come and the master's servants work until the great hall is full. Jesus then tells us that the King sees a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. 12 "So [the King] said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless." The king proclaims what might be seen as a very harsh punishment, but NOT when you consider that the wedding garment represents the white robes of righteous that we must be clothed with to stand in the Holy presence of God!

If someone thinks lightly of the proper confession of sins, or outright refuses to confess their sins, they can continue on in the worship service, they can hear a good sermon, they can bow their heads in prayer and even drop a gift in the basket and approach the Lord's Table...

But ultimately God as the master of the feast will come and ask, 'friend how did you come in here without a wedding garment?' ...and they will be speechless.

We on the other hand as those who have been called into God's presence and having rightly confessed out sins, hear gladly the Good News,

- **"Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for your sins and to be raised for your justification; & for His sake forgives you all your sins."**

Then and only then are we ready and willing "by the mercies of God," to "present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service."

- **We are ready to be consecrated by God, to ascend into the very presence of God where we will be instructed by His Word and rightly present our gifts and prayers which we shall learn more about next week!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 51:10-16:

"15 O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise. 16 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering.

17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart-- These, O God, You will not despise. 18 Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem."