

Confession is Good for the Soul...and Service!

Will you pray with me: *Heavenly Father, come to us in this moment and send your Holy Spirit to quiet our minds, still our hearts and make us attentive to your Word. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Over the years I have often heard and used the expression: “*Confession is good for the soul.*” I’ve always thought that phrase came directly from the Bible – and certainly as we bring our Lenten series on Confession to a close, we know that Scripture has a lot to say about confessing our sins of thought, word and deed. James 5:16 gives us a formula for confession: “*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.*” Proverbs 28:13 instructs, “*Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.*” And 1 John 1:9 promises, “*If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

“*Confession is*” indeed “*good for the soul*” a release of that inner cancer called sin and guilt, but interestingly the expression “*Confession is good for the soul*” is identified by most sources as an old Scottish proverb which appeared around the mid 1800’s. The literal meaning is that “*admitting your sins honestly is therapeutic and will make you feel better.*”¹ The saying might have originated as a good incentive for Scottish and Irish priests to get parishioners to come into the confessional booth, enumerating their sins, receiving penance and

reconciliation, ready to go out and live better and do better and feel better.

Perhaps so, but often for me, confession brings tears, sadness, an awareness of how often and regularly I *“fail to do the good I want, and the bad things I don’t want to do are the very things I keep on doing!”* (Romans 7:19) It is that *“spiritual tension”* and tug of war which Vicar Zach shared with us in his recent Lenten sermon. It is like Isaiah in tonight’s Old Testament Lesson, envisioning himself in the presence of the *“Holy, holy, holy LORD God of hosts,”* leading him to confess: *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for 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!”* (Isaiah 6:3-5) It is, as Thomas Dewar acknowledged, *“An honest confession is good for the soul, but bad for the reputation.”* It’s why my favorite prayer continues to be an ongoing, personal refrain: *“Thank you God for loving me...and forgiving me, even though you know me!”*

The outcome of confession, you see, is not just that we *“feel better,”* but that we marvel at God’s grace, mercy and forgiveness to sinners like you and me. It is the same *marvelous grace* experienced by Isaiah when the angel *“flew to him, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar.”* And he touched Isaiah’s mouth and said: *“Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”* (Isaiah 6:6) It is the same *wonderful grace* that we hear from Calvary’s Cross as the innocent, sinless Son of God gives His life for the sins of the world, yet Jesus praying, *“Father forgive them for they know not what they do!”* (Luke 23:47) It is that *“amazing grace”* of which we so often sing, *“how sweet the sound,”* trusting in all things that *“The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.”* (LSB744) It is

“sustaining grace,” reminding us especially in these days of COVID 19, sheltering in place, school closed, jobs impacted, people infected and dying, fears heightened, finances threatened and *“nothing”* in the routine of our lives stable, that we renew our hope in our God who promises that *“nothing in all of creation can separate us from His love!”* (Romans 8:38-39)

Given such promises in the Word of God, assured that by *“grace we have been saved through faith,”* (Ephesians 2:8) confession is indeed **“Good for the soul”** and I might add, **“Good for service!”** Confession cleanses and frees us to follow and serve our Holy God and Loving Savior, knowing all the while that we are *“not worthy, that I am and you are a man and a people of unclean lips,”* yet called just as Isaiah was, the voice of the Lord saying, *“Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?”* It is imperative, when it comes to the Kingdom of God, and to the mission of His church in this world, that we respond as did the prophet Isaiah, as did the disciples, as did the faithful followers before us, saying: *“Here I am! Send me...send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8)

Obviously, we are not able to come to church tonight to pray the prayers together, confess our sins together and hear this sermon delivered personally. Maybe that’s a blessing in disguise, *“God working for good in all things,”* (Romans 8:28) reminding you and me of the importance of not simply coming to church...but being the church! It is, as that simple children’s song teaches: *“The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple; the church is not a resting place, the church is a people!”*³

It’s people like you and me, remembering to pause and pray, trust and obey, especially when life’s circumstances are less than ideal. It’s people like you and me, calling elderly

family members, neighbors and friends just to check on them and see if they need anything. It's people like you and me, expressing gratitude for those who serve and protect, supporting the sacrifice of health care workers and teachers, church workers, pastors and national leaders who are doing their best in tough times. It is people like you and me, witnessing to those closest to us this deep, calm and abiding trust in Jesus Christ, confessing faith and confidence in the assurance of God's Holy Word: *"I will never leave you nor forsake you!"* (Hebrews 15:5)

No more excuses now, people of Hope, for ***"Confession is not only good for the soul...but also for service,*** responding to God's grace as did the prophet Isaiah: *"Here I am! Send me...send me!"* (Isaiah 6:8)

God bless us in the journey! AMEN!

- Rev. Preston E. Wagner, Pastor *Emeritus*
Hope Lutheran Church, Wake Forest, NC

¹ <https://writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary/confession-is-good-for-the-soul>

² <https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-thomas-dewar>

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