

Wednesday of Reminiscere, A ✠ D 2010

2 Samuel 11:1-12:23

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

1 Making excuses for sin is not confession. "What I did was wrong, but it's not completely my fault." Not confession. "Yes, I sinned, but others have much worse sin." Not confession. "Sure, it's sin, but it's not really a big deal." Not confession. "Sure, maybe my sin is a problem, but I'll deal with it later." Not confession. "I know it's wrong, so I'll ask for forgiveness later." Not confession.

2 This is confession: making no excuses for your sin. As the Psalmist says, "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity." (Ps 32:5) And "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." (Ps 51:17) If you claim to be without sin, you deceive yourself and the truth is not within you. If you claim that your sin is anyone's fault other than your own, you deceive yourself. If you suppose the sins of others eclipse your own, the truth is not within you. If you contend your sin is no big deal, you deceive yourself. If your confession of sins includes the word "but," if you say you have not sinned, you make God out to be a liar, and His word is not within you. Confession makes no excuses. Contrition doesn't try to justify sin. "The man who did this deserves to die...I have sinned against the Lord."

3 Repent of false, self-righteous confession. All sin means death. There is no such thing as little sin any more than there is little death. The wages of all sin is death, Paul says (Ro 6:23). There is no way out of sin. Grieve over your sin. This is good. This is what Paul calls "Godly grief," that is, sorrow over your sin is a gift from God. Despair over your inability to save yourself is a good thing. This grief leads not to despair but to confession. What sins should you confess? Before God, you should plead guilty of all sins, even those of which you are not aware, as you do in the Lord's Prayer; and before the pastor you should confess those sins which you know and feel in your hearts. Which sins are these? Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm? Confess your sins.

4 The Ten Commandments are a dangerous mirror. If you look at them, if you pray them, if you allow them to show you a picture of yourself, you will very quickly come for confession. They cannot save you. They can only cause you despair. So the scripted part of confession goes through the commandments as a checklist of sins. "I a poor sinner, plead guilty before God for all sins. I have lived as if God did not matter, and as if I mattered most. My Lord's name I have not honored as I should. My worship and prayers have faltered." There are commandments one, two, and three. "I have not let His love have its way with me, and so my love for others has failed. There are those whom I have hurt and those whom I have failed to help. My thoughts and desires have been soiled with sin." There's commandments four through ten. The service of private confession, which you can see on p. 292 of the hymnal, teaches you to confess that you have broken every single commandment. Your greatest sins are in your vocations. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? There are the arenas of your sin. No more excuses.

5 The Lord made no excuses for your sin. He didn't write it off as "no big deal," when He knew that inasmuch as your sin left you separated from Him, it was a big deal. He didn't scrap creation and start anew with some fresh, sinless humans. He made no excuse for your sin. Death was what sin earned, and He faced up to that consequence of your sin by sending His sinless Son to die in your place. That Jesus came, took human flesh, inseparably joined God and man together in His person, and was crucified for your sinfulness is proof of how seriously the Lord took your sin.

6 The Lord does not excuse your sin. But for the sake of Jesus who paid for your sin, he forgives your sin. He delights to bestow this life-giving gift upon you. Forgiveness is the medicine of healing, the elixir that restores life to your dead body. And the Lord loves to forgive your sins. As He works repentance within you so that you confess your sins, God is faithful and just and forgives your sins and cleanses you from all unrighteousness. In fact, the Lord so much wanted to guarantee that forgiveness would be given out that He created an office to carry on the ministry of Christ to forgive sins. The Lord has created the Office of the Holy Ministry as the means through which He forgives your sins.

7 God guarantees that His gifts get given out. So do not despise the Lord's gifts. Private confession and absolution is a treasure the Lord has entrusted to His church for your benefit. So that you might hear the clear word of Christ's forgiveness, God has created the Office of the Keys. So that you might not sit in your bedroom by yourself and try to talk yourself into feeling forgiven, God has appointed an external means, outside yourself, to deliver forgiveness. Don't foolishly suppose that private confession is a Roman Catholic thing. It's not. It's 1/6th of the Small Catechism. It's a service within the hymnal. The Lutheran reformers rejected the Roman abuses of Confession just like they rejected the Roman abuses of the Lord's Supper. Yet they no more stopped the practice of private confession than they stopped the practice of the Lord's Supper.

8 This gift from the Lord is for you. God who created all things by speaking them into existence, who creates faith through hearing, continues to work through words. There is no word more precious to you than the Lord's pronouncement of forgiveness. God is faithful and just to forgive your sins. Your guilt is atoned for, and your sin is taken away.

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Pastor Jeff Hemmer