

“A Secret for Healing: Confession & Forgiveness”

Lenten Service, March 24, 2010

Pastor Tim Eighmy

Please read Bible text: Luke 23:39-43

*Jesus was crucified between two convicted criminals. People were yelling and mocking Jesus, saying, “He saved others, let him save himself if he’s the Messiah!” and “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!”*

*For some reason, one of the criminals crucified next to Jesus even mocked him. Maybe he wanted to ‘rub it in’ and let Jesus know that there really is no such thing as hope in the world.*

*But the other criminal came to Jesus’ defense. He said to the first criminal, “We deserve what’s coming to us—but not this man.” He probably knew, like everyone else in that crowd, that Jesus wasn’t tried by a typical court of law; not even by Roman standards. It was a ‘kangaroo trial’ to please the crowds and keep them from rioting during the Passover festival.*

*Then the criminal said to Jesus, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus promised him, “Truly, today you will be in paradise with me.”*

Sometimes it takes a death bed for us to truly confess our sins before God. I am reminded of the story about W.C. Fields who was a devout atheist. When visiting him on his deathbed, a friend saw that Fields was reading the Bible. He asked him why he was reading the Bible. W.C. Fields said, “I’m looking for loopholes.”

Every Sunday we have the Order of Confession and Forgiveness in our Lutheran worship services. Theologians sometimes debate whether or not it’s a good thing for us to have Confession and Forgiveness in the worship service rather than encouraging people to have private confession with the pastor.

It is true that we are all sinful and need the forgiveness of Jesus Christ. It is also true that we receive the promise of God’s forgiveness every time we confess our sins; even in a general way like we do on Sunday mornings.

However, to truly confess to God the sins that really burden our lives, the sins that make us feel guilty and get in the way of our relationships with others, the sins that get in the way of our growing in

faith with Jesus Christ, to be honest about those sins and to truly confess them—isn't easy. It takes a lot of trust or a lot of desperation.

For many people, churches are not safe places. To admit publicly a certain wrong could start members gossiping, or being angry with each other, or speaking badly about someone else.

There are people who struggle with chemical addictions, sex addictions, gambling addictions, and addictions to criminal behavior that they would never talk about in a church. There are people who have abusive tendencies, who have been raped or physically abused or verbally violated by the people they love. There are people who frequently hurt themselves, and there are young women who made the painful decision to have an abortion. They would never reveal these dark secrets in a church because of the fear of church members scorning them and not truly forgiving them.

It takes a lot of trust in God and a lot of trust in God's people to confess honestly about the reality of how sinful we really are. It's not easy. Confessing our sins is hard work. It is a soul-searching effort to name the sins that truly control our lives.

By contrast, it is very easy to say "God forgives you." And it should be even easier to actually believe it. When you confess your

deepest, darkest sins the people of God still forgive you in the name of Jesus Christ.

Many sins are actually socially acceptable in our culture. It's easy to name the immoral sins, but to name sins that are socially acceptable takes courage and a lot of trust in God's will.

These past few weeks, I have named some of these sins that seem to be accepted in our culture.

- Our putting down other people's reputations
- Our negative interpretation of the world around us
- Our apathy toward the needs of those around us
- Our high, unrealistic expectations of others

*Because God's forgiveness is real, we have the absolution of sins through Christ's death on the cross and in his resurrection from the dead. We can now dare to name our sins with confidence and trust in God and in the hope of Jesus Christ before our brothers and sisters in Christ.*

*And if your brothers and sisters in Christ truly believe in the forgiveness and salvation of Christ through the Cross, they will forgive you too.*

Amen.