

Lenten Reflection

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15, ESV)

As you’re undoubtedly aware, during our mid-week Lenten services this year we are reflecting upon the Penitential Psalms – Psalms 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143, and 22. And it truly is an appropriate time to reflect upon these Psalms because Lent is the most penitential season in the church year. Therefore this month’s newsletter article is also an appropriate opportunity to review what *Luther’s Small Catechism* teaches about repentance and confession. I will be quoting from the newest edition of the *Small Catechism with Explanation* being used in the LCMS – namely, *Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation*, published by Concordia Publishing House, with a 2017 copyright date. I will refer to this edition as *LSC* following each quotation I make from it.

To begin, in the glossary in the newest edition of the *Small Catechism*, “repentance” is defined as: **“Turning away from sin to faith in Jesus and His forgiveness”** (*LSC*, p. 397). And this is God’s work. For through His Word of the Law (preached, read, and taught), God makes individuals **“sorry for their sins (contrition)”** (*LSC*, Question #338, p. 316). And through His Word of the Gospel, God gives individuals **“trust in Christ as their Savior (faith)”** so that they may **“receive this forgiveness”** (*LSC*, Question #338, p. 316). For all forgiveness was purchased for us by Jesus at the cross. And He distributes this absolution to us through His Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. And as Luther reminds us: **“Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation”** (*LSC*, Explanation of the Benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar, p. 331). And **“faith does not make the sacrament, but it is only through faith that we receive the divinely promised benefit of the sacrament”** (*LSC*, Question #296, p. 284).

This defines repentance. But how does it play out in the life of God’s church? Through confession. Luther said: **“Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven”** (*LSC*, p. 306).

See, the Christian life is one of confession. It’s a life of walking daily in our Baptism – renouncing and rejecting our sin and receiving the absolution Jesus earned for us and now distributes to us through His Word and Sacraments. And there is great relief in receiving the Good News that **“the blood of Jesus [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7, ESV).

King David wrote: **“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.... When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.... I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not conceal. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and You forgave the iniquity of my sin”** (Psalm 32:1, 3, 5, Modern English Version). And in the New Testament, the Apostle John similarly said: **“If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness”** (1 John 1:9, Modern English Version).

Therefore Christians are people who confess their sins - not only throughout Lent, but also throughout the entire year. We publicly confess our sins in worship each Sunday. And although some are ignorant of the fact, Lutheranism also teaches the value of privately confessing one's sins as well. In fact, in Article 11 of the *Augsburg Confession*, one of the documents in *The Lutheran Confessions* that we in the LCMS unconditionally subscribe to as a faithful exposition of the Bible, it says: "Our churches teach that private Absolution should be retained in the churches, although listing all sins is not necessary for Confession" (*Augsburg Confession, Article XI, Lines 1-2*). Quoted from "*Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions,*" *Second Edition*, published by Concordia Publishing House, copyright 2006). And for those who are unaware, I am available (by individual appointment) to hear private confessions.

My friends, confession is a fundamental part of the Christian life. But we ought not view confession as an act of obedience that earns God's favor. For confession of sin, whether it be made publicly in corporate worship or individually in private Confession & Absolution, is not meant to burden us, but instead to bring comfort and relief. For the Christian confesses for the sake of the absolution – confidently knowing and trusting that every sin has been paid for at the cross. So, with sincere joy we heed our Lord's words: "***Repent and believe in the gospel.***" For God is gracious in Christ – freely bestowing forgiveness, salvation, and unending life through His Son, our crucified Savior.

Blessings on the remainder of your Lententide.
See you in church,
Pastor

Psalm Readings for March

WEEK ONE: Sunday, March 05: PSALM 68:19-35; Monday, March 06: PSALM 69:1-15; Tuesday, March 07: PSALM 69:16-36; Wednesday, March 08: PSALM 70; Thursday, March 09: PSALM 71; Friday, March 10: PSALM 14; Saturday, March 11: PSALM 73

WEEK TWO: Sunday, March 12: PSALM 74; Monday, March 13: PSALM 75; Tuesday, March 14: PSALM 76; Wednesday, March 15: PSALM 77; Thursday, March 16: PSALM 78:1-37; Friday, March 17: PSALM 78:38-72; Saturday, March 18: PSALM 79

WEEK THREE: Sunday, March 19: PSALM 80; Monday, March 20: PSALM 81; Tuesday, March 21: PSALM 82; Wednesday, March 22: PSALM 83; Thursday, March 23: PSALM 84; Friday, March 24: PSALM 85; Saturday, March 25: PSALM 86

WEEK FOUR: Sunday, March 26: PSALM 87; Monday, March 27: PSALM 88; Tuesday, March 28: PSALM 89:1-19; Wednesday, March 29: PSALM 89:20-37; Thursday, March 30: PSALM 89:38-52; Friday, March 31: PSALM 90; Saturday, April 1: PSALM 91