

Sermon September 25, 2016 - Pentecost 19

Healing Worship Confession and Absolution

Selected verses



Dear Friends in Christ,

Welcome once again to our sermon series on Worship. The first week we learned that Worship begins with God, it begins with his actions as he comes to us bringing healing of the soul. We respond with praise and thanksgiving. We also learned that Worship has to be in spirit and truth, but in order for it to be in spirit and truth God has to work first in our hearts. Worship is not something we initiate but it is our response to God's goodness.

We also learned that our worship services follow a liturgy, an order, an order called liturgy that literally means "the works of the People" and which follows a process, illustrated in this diagram.

Last week we started meditating on each of the aspects of our liturgy, beginning with the Invocation, calling on God's name as he has gathered us, bringing us up into his presence, as we climb up to Mount Zion, after all our Worship Services when done in Spirit and Truth, are a mountain top experiences. Really our worship services from God's point of view are a mountain top experience. Did you know that before? Yes a mountain top experience! Aw we learned it from the letter to the Hebrews chapter 12, would please somebody read Hebrews chapter 12, verses 22 to 24: (Hebrews 12:2-24) "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel."

Now this text refers to God's kingdom as a whole, but then again it is here in Church, in spirit and truth, that God's Kingdom reveals itself and comes to each one of us, which in turn enables us to live our lives in Christ, in faith and victory. Therefore this text in a way summarizes what we do here in Worship services every time we gather with one another.

In other words, every time we gather as a church around God's word, receiving his gifts, we come to Mt. Zion, we come to Christ. But as God gathers us in His name, in his presence, what follows is the recognition of our condition and God's holiness.

That's the second action of our Worship Services. To do something we call Confession and Absolution. It cleanses us, it prepares us, it makes us clean so we can stand in God's presence, for he is holy and perfect.

Our condition doesn't not compare to his holiness, not even deserve to be in God's presence, for our condition is what the Bible calls sinful, in other words guilty, guilty of wrong doings against God and against other humans, for breaking his commandments. But the beauty of our worship Services is that it is God who gathers

us and as he gathers us he cleanses so we be can stand in his presence. And we do that by confessing our sins and receive His forgiveness.

Therefore this morning, let us confess our sins. In our church we do benefit from a form, a set of wording that helps us confess our sins, we find that order in our hymnal, or today on the screen, it does make things easier for us to follow it for those words summarize in general terms what otherwise we might have a hard time to explain, or voice.

Let us confess our sins.....

Now, how are we assured that we are cleansed, and that our sins, our wrongdoings are forgiven? By the voice of absolution, spoken by the pastor in the stead and command of Christ, we know we are forgiven. It is Christ's command, not the voice of the pastor, or his will, but because Christ said so. He said: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld." (John 20:22b-23)

Therefore receive now the forgiveness of your sins.... (Absolution)

Sermon Part II

Grace and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

I have a question for you: maybe more for you Moms, your child is playing soccer or footfall outside, it's been a long day, and he is all sweaty, muddy and, well stinky, comes home, you are expecting him for supper, but when he sees you he is ready to give you a hug, now, what would you do? Would you return the hug and welcome him with open arms, and say, my son? Or would you send him to maybe shower? Change and once he is all clean and changed, would you only then embrace him? If so, why didn't you embrace him at first, after all he is your son? Well the answer is simply, of course you love your son very much, but he stinks, he needed to be cleansed first, before you would embrace him. Right? Right!

Now that's exactly what God does with each one of us. As you see, he does welcome each and every one of us, and with open arms. In fact he is the one who not only is waiting to come to him, but he is actually seeking you where you are at, and different from what Mom would do, send the child to the shower, God actually is the one who patiently cleans us, gives us a good "bath" and we call it absolution.

The dirt and mud on us are our sins and the wrongs we have done against God, against one another, and even against ourselves. God' calls them sins, sins that we need to confess in worship, in God's house, in the New Jerusalem, the mountain top of worship.

Yes we are sinful human beings in need of healing forgiveness. Or are we? After all we are good people, right? And God has given us the invitation to come to his house, so we must be good, right? Besides I haven't done anything bad, or have I?

And more, what is forgiveness any ways? In the Old Testament the word for forgiveness comes from the same word that means "lift" or "carry." Forgiveness then means lifting somebody's sins or faults, and carrying them away, taken them away.

Simply said, is declaring somebody guiltless, that whatever offence you have committed is dealt with in a positive and restorative manner. But still, me sinful being?

In the Old Testament reading we heard earlier, we heard this word: "Woe."

Let's hear once again what those words are, wold somebody please read (Amos 6:1) Amos, chapter 6 verse 1: "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who

feel secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the first of the nations, to whom the house of Israel comes!"

Now, (Amos 6:4) let's hear verse 4: "Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall."

Then the text says: " but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!" that is over the ruin of their nation, the ruin of their neighbours, the ruin of their identity and their spirituality. They would care more about themselves, but then again, that's what they think because by their own doing they were destroying themselves.

As you see, this word "Woe" is given for those who have a reckless living, a reckless life style. Yet the word is not only spoken of careless living, it's also giving, is also spoken to you and to me, to all people, for we all have a sinful nature. The devil entices all of us to treat ourselves as first, ahead of God and of others. It applies to both those who don't know Christ and those who know him, God's people. It applies to those who have been baptized, those who have professed a Christian Faith, for the reality is that although we have been declared to be without sin on account of Jesus, still give ways to a selfish sinful behavior, living as the world lives, living in a lavish land of abundance that you use for personal gain. At times we become more enraged when the church doesn't provide what we want, more than we are when the world destroys us physically and spiritually.

Woe to you, the Prophet says. Keep living like the world and you'll be first going the route of hell.

Now, God's "woe" stings, doesn't it! It accuses even us baptized Christians, who sin daily and need God's forgiveness. We assess our lives and realize that at times we fail to care for the people God puts in our lives. We know that we deserve hell for our sinful selfishness.

But here is the Good News, we do have God's forgiveness, he hears our repentance and our confession. He has promised, he has worked it that he would wash us clean, forgiven, ready to be embraced by God almighty and holy!

On account of Jesus, you are blessed! All your sins are washed away—your missed opportunities, your failures, your egocentric actions, and your times of yielding to the devil, the world, and your sinful nature's "me-first" focus. Your sins are all washed away! Jesus' innocent blood shed for you on the cross cleanses you from the filth of your self-centered focus. He restores your focus. He puts your focus on him, on his love for you. He does this by speaking the Absolution through his ordained servant, by whom Jesus also delivers to you his true body and blood, which in turn creates fervent love toward one another. And what is more, what follows our worship comes out of the flow of forgiveness, the hymn of praise, just as another prophet writes, lets read all together, from the Prophet Zephaniah 3:17: "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing."

In his name, amen.