

Confession

By Vicar Jake Zabel

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Sermon text: 1 John 1:5-2:2

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. But if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Lord sanctify us by your truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. So many people today refuse to acknowledge their sin. They refuse to accept the fact that what they are doing is wrong. When their consciences are pricked they lash out and seek to defend themselves. The natural inclination of man is self-justification. When children are caught fighting, they instantly try to justify themselves, “it wasn’t my fault, he started it.”

The sin of self-justification began with our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they felt the guilt, they knew that had done wrong and so they desperately tried to cover their own sin and justify themselves. They hid from God, they withdrew themselves from God’s presence. They covered themselves in leaves, desperately trying to hide their sin.

And when they were confronted, and convicted of their sins they became defensive. When their consciences were pricked by the Word of God they attempted to justify their actions. “It wasn’t my fault,” cried Adam, “the woman You gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit.” “It wasn’t my fault,” argued Eve, “the serpent deceived me.”

And to this day man is still trying to justify himself. Whenever our consciences are pricked by the Word of God, and we feel the guilt of our sins, we make excuses in a desperate attempt to self-justify. We hear it every day in our society. People justify abortion by denying science and calling the unborn child a blob of tissues. People justify homosexuality by saying things like “but I love him or her”, “it’s natural”, “I

was born this way”, or even worse “God created me this way.” People justify divorce by saying that “we just didn’t fit together” “we weren’t right for each.” But all of this flies in opposition to God’s Word which condemns murder, homosexuality and divorce, and praises childbearing and marriage between one man and one woman.

This sin of self-justification is not just something out there, but is a sin that we all commit on a daily basis. We all self-justify.

“It okay for me to hate that person because they hate me,” we say. But God’s Word says “Love your enemy.”

“It okay for me to lie in this situation, it’s only a little white lie,” we say. But God’s Word says “you shall not bear false witness.”

“It’s not adultery just to look,” we say. But God’s Word says, “whoever looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery in his heart.”

“It’s okay to take this, it’s not really stealing,” we say. But God does not see it that way.

Hate is hate, lying is lying, cheating is cheating, and stealing is stealing.

When we self-justify, we deny God’s Word and promote lies instead. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God into a liar and His Word is not in us. We deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, then Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we confess our sins they are forgiven. When Peter was asked the question “What shall we do?” He cried “repent and be baptized.”

Confess your sins, repent of the wickedness you have done and believe that your sins are forgiven. For Christ is the propitiation of our sins, and not only ours but also the sins of the whole world.

By Christ’s death and resurrection we have been justified by His blood. There is no need to justify ourselves because Christ has already justified us.

In fact, we can’t justify ourselves. When we deny our sin God’s truth is not in us. For when we deny our sins we deny God’s Word. We place our own will above God’s will, our own thoughts above His thoughts and our own ways above His ways.

In Luke’s Gospel Jesus tells us to “repent or perish.” (Luke 13:5) Confess your sins or you will perish. When we self-justify, we hide ourselves from God. Like Adam and Eve hiding in the Garden we flee from God’s presence.

In John’s Gospel Jesus says, “the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come into the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” (John 3:19-20)

This is why we self-justify, because we fear judgement, we fear that our reputation will be destroyed, that people will think less of us, we fear that we will get in trouble and be punished. Therefore, we hide. We keep our sins locked away in a closet. We hide our wickedness in the darkness, that no one may see it.

However, that is exactly what Satan wants. He wants us to self-justify. He wants us to hide. Because when we hide we run from God, we flee His presence, just as Adam and Eve ran and hid when they heard God coming in the Garden. Satan wants us to self-justify, and keep our sin hidden. Because when we keep our sins in the darkness, we keep ourselves in the darkness. In order to keep our sins from being exposed we choose the darkness. And then Satan has us where he wants us, for those who walk in darkness, do not practice truth and do not share in the fellowship of God.

Satan is the master of trapping us in our sins. His first trick is temptation. He convinces us that what we're doing is not wrong, and so we do it, we sin. Then comes the guilt, it eats at us, burdening us and weighing us down. So we self-justify, we defend ourselves, we make excuses. In doing so Satan builds us up. But only in order to tear us down. Eventually the guilt becomes too much and when we can no longer self-justify we fall into despair, we plummet into darkness. We hide ourselves away, secluding ourselves in darkness, hoping that no rays of light will expose our sin. The more we attempt to hide the further we crawl into the darkness. And the deeper we go, the further we get from God and His Word. And the further we withdraw from God the worse our sin becomes.

This is how Satan traps us, he wants to draw us further away from God and deeper into the darkness of sin.

This is exactly how addiction works. It doesn't matter what the addiction is, they all work the same way. Whether it's the sin of alcoholism, drug addiction, adultery, pornography, gambling addiction, homosexuality, kleptomania (stealing addiction), pathological lying (lying addiction), or any other sin, they all work the same way.

First comes temptation, the lure to try it. Then comes the first hit, immediately followed by the thrill, a mental, emotional, psychological, physical or even spiritual high, which increases your desire for this sin. Then comes the crash, when the thrill has passed and the guilt and shame sets in. That's when self-justification first appears, the desperate attempt to excuse or to hide the sin, in order to relieve yourself of the guilt you know feel. But self-justification can only go so far, that's when despair sets in. The guilt, the shame, the anxiety, the self-hatred as the reality of your sin weighs you down. You try to self-justify but it doesn't work, you try to deaden your conscience but you can't. The darkness closes in around you and you feel helpless. And then Satan reaches out his "helping" hand. He reminds you of the thrill, the high you felt. He offers you relief to your despair. His answer "just one more hit." Another

bottle, another drug, another role of the dice, another lie, another woman, another magazine, something new to steal; whatever the sin, whatever the addiction, Satan reaches out his hand and gives you another go. Then the loop continues over and over again. He lifts you up and then lets you fall. The cycle of sin, thrill, guilt, self-justify, despair, sin again goes on and on. And so Satan traps you. The longer the cycle continues the worse it becomes. The more we seek to hide our sin, the further we venture into the darkness. And so the sin becomes worse, we drink more, the drugs get stronger, the bets become higher, the gambling become more frequent, the sex becomes more perverse, the stealing become greater, the lying becomes more , the sin becomes greater.

We become slaves to sin, we become trapped in darkness.

So what do we do?

Come into the light. Turn to Jesus is repentance. Confess your sins and lay them at the foot of the cross.

If we expose our sins by bringing them into the light, then we expose ourselves to that light. That light is Jesus Christ, who took those sins upon Himself in death upon the cross. Those sins have been forgiven; therefore we can confess them without fear of punishment. We can let go of our sins, and our guilt and our despair. If we hold on to our sins they weigh us down, but if we let go of them, Christ has removed them from us.

Jesus says, “come onto me, all you who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28) All who are weary and burdened by their sin, come to God and He will give you rest. Brings your sins to Jesus and He will remove your burden. Confess and you are forgiven.

This means bringing your sin into the light and exposing it. Sin only has power in darkness, and when sin is brought into light the powers of darkness are destroyed and sin no longer binds you.

Jesus sent Paul to preach the Gospel in order that those who hear it will have their eyes open, that they will be turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive the forgiveness of sins and be sanctified by faith in Christ (Acts 26:18).

Time and time again Scripture speaks of Christians being brought into the light. Those who are in the light are exposed and their sins are exposed. However, those who stand exposed in the light, stand in the light of Christ and have received His forgiveness.

Therefore, do not try to hide you sins. For those who hide their sins, seek the darkness, lest the light exposes their evil deeds. Instead confess your sins. For as

James said, “confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” (James 5:16)

If we hide our sins and claim that we are without sins, we deceive ourselves. But if we confess our sins we will be healed, our sins are forgiven and we are cleansed from all unrighteousness.

Since the Reformation, Lutherans have struggled to maintain private confession. The Catholics made private confession into a mandate, a law, a work you had to do. But that stripes confession of the blessing that it truly is. Confession is not a law, or a work or a burden but a gift. Lutherans removed the mandate of private confession, and sadly many people have disregarded private confession altogether.

Lutherans have not done away with private confession. Article XI of the *Augsburg Confession* makes this clear when it says “concerning confession, it is taught among us that private confession should be retained and not abolished”.

Private confession is a gift, that provides healing and comfort. As Luther said in 1529 concerning private confession, “if I were offered all treasure in a world where all the leaves on the trees and all the grains of sand in the ocean were gold, on the condition that I abstain from private confession, I would immediately turn down the offer.” Luther considered private confession to be one of the greatest gifts that God has given us.

Private confession sets us free from sin in a way that public confession fails to achieve in the sense that when we confess a particular sin in private to another Christian, we receive healing for that sin.

When we are burdened by our sins we should not hide them away, we should not try to justify ourselves. Instead we should confess our sins and be justified by Jesus.

There are three benefits that private confession has over public confession.

The first is diagnosis. Public confession is a generic acknowledge that we sin. But private confession is a specific identification and diagnosis of the sin that burdens us most.

You don’t go to a doctor and say “I’ve got a generic illness,” and then receive a generic cure.

No, when we go to the doctor we tell them specifically what is wrong, they diagnose the specific problem and then give us a cure for that particular problem.

As John said, if we deny our sins we deceive ourselves, God’s Word and God’s truth is not in us and lead ourselves away from God and into the darkness. But if we confess our sin we have forgiveness and healing. If we acknowledge our sins, if we name it and claim it, we can finally be freed from it.

Which is the second benefit, the cure. When we become trapped in sin, we fall into despair. We are guilty and we feel ashamed of our sin. We feel that that sin cannot be forgiven. But when we openly confess that sin, we can receive forgiveness for it.

If you name the sin that is burdening you, then you can receive freedom from that specific sin. You can hear the words of absolution spoken over you, for that specific sin, and you can be assured that that sin is forgiven.

And the third benefit is help. If you confess to a fellow Christian that you have sinned and that you are struggling with sin, they can help you. They can hold you accountable, they can offer advice, they can walk with you and help you to go forth and sin no more.

Most people don't like coming to private confession. They are afraid to confess their sins to the pastor, we're afraid that he might judge us, or think less of us. We're afraid to admit to the pastor that we're fallen creatures. But there is no need to fear.

John was a pastor himself. He wrote to his congregation and said, "my little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. But is anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins."

We do not need to fear confessing our sins, because Jesus has already died for us and removed the punishment for our sin. When the women caught in adultery stood before Jesus, He said "neither do I condemn you." Her sins were already forgiven.

And when you come to private confession and confess your sins to the pastor, you can do so without fear of judgement. For the pastor is the ambassador of Christ (2 Cor. 5:20), when he speaks he speaks the Words of Christ (Luke 10:16). Therefore, when you confess your sins to the pastor he speaks only the Words of Christ, "neither do I condemn you." The pastor speaks the only Words of God and the Word of God declares you forgiven.

If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord (Eph. 5: 8), for Christ has turned you from the darkness to the light, from the power of Satan to God, that you may receive the forgiveness of sins and be sanctified by faith in Christ. Jesus is the light of the world that exposes all sin, and if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Amen.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ the righteous, who cleanse you of all sins, comfort you with His forgiveness. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

O God our Father, Lord of all, the creator and sustainer of all things in heaven and on earth, we bow before You in worship, and bring before You our praise and our prayers. In

the name of Your only Son Jesus Christ, we ask You to forgive us our many sins, and to rescue us from what we deserve because of them. Come into our lives with Your power, and save us from the temptations and dangers that threaten us.

We recognise our own weakness and know we need Your help. Without Your strength we can do nothing. Therefore, give us the power and blessing of Your Holy Spirit, so that we may stand in the grace You gave us in Baptism, and that we may live a life that measures up to the standard You set when You called us to faith. Inspire us with the Gospel about Your delivering up the Son of Man into the hands of sinful men. Because we humbly receive all spiritual blessings from You, take away our stubborn self-wills, and lead us to do Your perfect will. Take away our pride and conceit, and make us humble. Take away our critical and grumbling spirit, and make us content. Take away our resentment and anger, and make us gentle and patient. Help us in love to put up with each other's faults and weaknesses, as people who have been made rich by Your love.

Pour out Your blessing on Your Church, O God. By the Spirit's power, make us one in heart and mind, in the peace of Christ. Enable us to grasp the Church's oneness in Christ in the truth of the Gospel. Take away from us our pride and sinful desire for pre-eminence. Inspire us by Jesus' humble service to us to serve You gratefully through serving our neighbours. Give us opportunities to demonstrate the confession of the Gospel before the world, that people may be drawn to Your Son and rejoice in Your salvation.

Give Your guidance and blessing to all lawful authority, especially to our Queen and her representatives, and the parliaments of our Commonwealth and State. Give them wisdom and sound judgment, that godliness may rule and evil be kept in check.

Be the guardian of our homes and families. Make them places where Your Word is treasured, where faith in You produces love, and where love expresses itself in service to You and others.

Touch with Your healing power the sick, the sorrowing, and the suffering. Hear their cry, and remember them in Your mercy. Show them that You are the ever-present source of help, and the saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

These things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

18th Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet with aged wines, rich foods full of marrow, and refined, aged wines. ⁷ On this mountain He will destroy the surface of the shroud that is covering all peoples and the blanket that has been woven over all nations. ⁸ He

will swallow up death for ever. The Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and He will remove the disgrace of His people from the whole earth. For the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day people will say: "Look! This is our God. We have been waiting for Him to save us. This is the LORD, for whom we have been waiting. Let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!"

Philippians 4:4-13

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again: Rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be evident to all people! The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything make your requests known to God by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving! ⁷ The peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, will also guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing, and anything that is excellent and praiseworthy! ⁹ Continue to put into practice what you have learned, received, and heard from me, and what you have seen in me! The God of peace will also be with you.

¹⁰ I am very glad in the Lord that now again you have revived your concern for me. You have been concerned, but have not had an opportunity to show it. ¹¹ I am not saying that I need anything. For I have learned to be content in whatever situation I am in. ¹² I know how to be in need, and I know how to have plenty. In every way and in everything I have learnt the secret both of being fully satisfied and of being hungry, both of having plenty and of having too little. ¹³ I can do everything through Him who strengthens me.

Matthew 22:1-14

¹ Again Jesus used parables in speaking to them. He said: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a

wedding for his son. ³ He sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding, but they refused to come. ⁴ Then he sent other servants and said to them, ‘Tell the people who have been invited, “Look here! I have prepared my dinner. My bulls and fattened calves have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding!”’

⁵ “However, they paid no attention and went away, one to his farm, another to his business; ⁶ and the rest seized his servants, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷ The king became angry. He sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

⁸ “Then he told his servants: ‘The wedding is ready, but the people who have been invited have not deserved to come. ⁹ Therefore go where the highways leave the city, and invite everyone you find to the wedding!’

¹⁰ “Those servants went out on the highways and brought in all the people whom they found, both bad and good. Then the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹ “When the king came in to observe the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing a wedding garment. ¹² He asked him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ The man could not say a thing. ¹³ Then the king told the servants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!’

¹⁴ “For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

