

COMMUNION MEDITATION: TEXTS AND NOTES FOR FEBRUARY 7, 2016 (WVPC)

“THE DISCIPLINE OF CONFESSION”

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The great Fourth Century Christian teacher St. Augustine once said that confession is like daily baptism:

- the opening of the heart and mind to the deepest truth we can know about God’s will and love for us: that we are called to be his children forever in resurrection life,
- that through our living faith in Jesus Christ we are enabled to understand ourselves more accurately, to open ourselves in humble honesty to his cleansing grace, to walk more and more in his light,
- and to live together as brothers and sisters who love and care with deep trustworthiness, openness, compassion, and mutual support.

From the very beginning of the Christian faith nearly 2,000 years ago, the practice of confessing sins has been an essential part of our worship, our fellowship, and our private lives. The roots of that confession were in the Hebrew Scriptures, such as Psalm 32:5,

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

We find a classic statement of our Christian understanding of confession in the First Letter of John.

I JOHN 1:5-10 “This is the message that we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we 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 his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say 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 we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his truth is not in us.”

As we evangelical Protestants understand this text, confession of sin is for the purpose of clearing away the damage that sin causes to our relationship with God and with our fellows--in order to move forward in the light of Jesus Christ. Confession and forgiveness are meant

We are meant to “walk in the light” of God’s gracious truth as revealed in Scripture. Our walk in that light includes understanding that we live in a world where God’s good pattern of living is compromised and disrupted by our disobedience. Like willful children who take their budding individuality a bit too seriously and enjoy defying their parents. Eventually they learn that their parents guided them out of love, just as our heavenly Father commands us and guides us as an embodiment of wise love.

JAMES 5:13-16 “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”

(Quote from Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, pp. 147-148)

There is a wonderful and healing power in a Christian fellowship of brothers and sisters who grow to care for each other with wholesome Christian love, are both nonjudgmental and encourage each other toward faithfulness to the Word of God, who keep confidences, are honest with themselves about sin and grace, and pray for each other faithfully. That is an essential part of the discipline of confession.