



April 7, 2017
“How are people to be taught to confess?”

[Read Luke 18:9-14](#)

Lutherans have a sort of allergic reaction to any sort of rite of Individual Confession and Forgiveness. “What business is it of anybody’s what I have done?” some will demand. “Isn’t that between God and me?” they might ask. “Isn’t that part of what Luther rejected in the Protestant Reformation?” they continue. “And besides,” they conclude, “how in the world can any human forgive my sins? It is only God who can forgive sin.”

Interesting points all of them—and not very useful. In fact, Jesus gives Christians the responsibility to speak words of forgiveness and absolution to one another. You can find these commands in Matthew 18:18 and in John 20:22-23. Jesus gives the Church what is called “the Office of the Keys,” so that we can hear someone speak aloud God’s words of forgiveness to us. This is not a burden. It is a joyous gift.

The Church in the Middle Ages had turned confession into a sacrament on a par with baptism. More accurately, baptism was understood to wash away the original sin with which we were born. But confession (the Sacrament of Penance) was necessary to take care of all the sins committed after baptism. Luther found that even if he confessed eight hours a day, he couldn’t keep up with all the sins known and unknown he committed. He lived with a terrified conscience.

Part of the Luther’s gospel discovery was that God is faithful to God’s promise made in Holy Baptism. Baptism is not just a “downpayment” on forgiveness. It is the whole deal! So confession is a return to baptism. It is a joyous return because we know that God forgives us. Because we know we are forgiven, we can confess with the confidence of faith. After all, who would risk confessing to God if the outcome were in doubt!

Of course, we can experience God’s forgiveness just “between me and Jesus.” But Luther was an excellent student of sinful human nature. We are geniuses when it comes to self-deception. What we see as God’s forgiveness is often us just letting ourselves off the hook. We can only benefit from God’s forgiveness when we genuinely repent and seek to what the old hymnals call “amendment of life.” That happens most fully when we speak words of confession of our pastor or a trusted Christian friend.

It may be that you have something that burdens your conscience and won’t let you rest. It may be that you long to hear the words of forgiveness spoken directly and personally to you rather than to a congregation in general. It may be that you desire some help in determining the best ways to amend your life and move into a new direction in your days. If so, you might want to make an appointment with your pastor or a trusted Christian friend for a confessional conversation.

This is so important that Luther sometimes regarded Confession as a third Sacrament. At the very least he called it a blessed gift to the Church, a gift he often called the “mutual conversation and consolation of the saints.” That conversation and consolation are the power of baptism in action.

Let’s pray. God of grace and glory, in Holy Baptism you free us from the powers that want us dead. Assure us of your daily forgiveness and equip us to humbly confession to you. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Consider taking some time to make a confessional appointment with your pastor or a trusted Christian friend.