

Vicar Andrew Wolfgram
Confession and Absolution- 1 John 1:8-9
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Setting: Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Confession and Absolution

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What is the most important part of a book you have read or a movie that you have watched? Some people might say it's the story line or the special effects that were the most important thing. Others might say the way the characters were dressed was the most important thing. At the very core, the very basic level, the most important thing is the interaction between the characters. This interaction between characters shows the relationship between them. This interaction is seen most clearly in the dialog that is spoken. Dialog is an important part of the story line of a book or film. This call and response, the give and take, these are important. Each person has a role to play. Questions are asked by one and are answered by another. For some people, dialog only ends in a discourse between the two parties involved. At other times, words are used to restore the relationship. Things are declared and made right between characters. The characters' relationship can be made or broken during this dialog with one another.

Dialog sounds a lot like what the Divine Service sounds like. Last week Pastor taught us about the beginning dialog of the service when the pastor or myself says: "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The congregation responds: "Amen." As we heard in the sermon, there is so much content packed in those brief 16 words in the dialog

between pastor and congregation. We remember our Baptism, where we were washed, forgiven of our sins, and justified. But what now? The dialog moves forward.

We move one from the first section: Invocation to the second section: Confession and Absolution. This next section of dialog continues as we look at all the times that we failed in life. We remember all the times that we have fallen short. We respond in dialog reciting 1 John 1:8-9 when we say: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

We acknowledge that we have failed and have not kept the truth. We then pause for silence and reflection. When we pause for silence and reflection, we remember those times that we sinned against our neighbor. We remember the times that we don't have the truth in us. The times that we sinned against our families. The times when we sinned against God. We remember what we have done and feel sorry for the sins that we have committed. The sins that keep us up at night. The sins that break up our relationships with one another. The sins that tear us from our relationship with God. We acknowledge our standing before God in Psalm 130: “If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.” (Psalm 130:3-4)

We come before our Triune God, who has justified us and we attempt to say that we have done no wrong. If we say there is nothing wrong, we are lying to ourselves. The truth is not in us. We come before the Judgement seat of God, as His children to confess our sins. We tell God those wrong things that we have done, and what we have left undone. We reveal the times that we have sinned in our thoughts. The times that we have sinned in our words. The times that we have sinned in our deeds. We sum up all the times that we have failed into this one paragraph

that we speak together as God's people. When we have failed in our attempts to live as God would have us do. We stand before God, and we plead for mercy, as a people justly deserving what our sins deserve, present and eternal punishment.

Our standing could end there but it doesn't. God's gavel does not come down crushing you. God brings not judgement, but in His mercy He gave His own Son to die for you. Pastor literally steps and stands in the place of Christ and declares you forgiven. You are forgiven because of what Christ has done on the cross for you when he died for you.

When the pastor says that as a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, he therefore forgives you all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Your pastor says this on the basis of what Christ said when He gave to the Church the office of the keys.

This is the office of the keys as defined in the Explanation of Luther's Small Catechism, "The office of the Keys is that special authority which Christ has given to His church on earth to forgive the sins of repentant sinners, but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant."

Where is this written? That is what St. John the Evangelist writes in chapter twenty: The Lord Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them they are not forgiven."

When you are absolved of your sin, the weight of your sin is lifted off you. You experience a right relationship with God. The slate is wiped clean. This dialog continues throughout the service. This call and response of what God says and what we say. What we say and what God says in response to us His children. As we were reminded that God brought us together in this place to worship, He is there to absolve us of the times when we have fallen short

of His glory. That is why we are here in God's presence. This relationship between us and our God, who He has made us to be and the times that we fall short. We are here for our relationship with God to be restored.

Confession and absolution is a part of this relationship restoration with God. We come with our sin-filled consciousness, knowing that we can't keep God's law perfectly and we confess our sins. We confess and are given the sweet sound of the Gospel. On the basis of Christ's innocent suffering, death, and resurrection, we are forgiven. The relationship is made right. Like the relationship that is made right through words in a book or film, this dialog makes us right with God. Not because of what we have done, but what Christ has done for us. Amen.

"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine... to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21