

“The Truth About Forgiveness”

Psalm 32

Part II of VIII in the Lenten sermon series, “Forgiveness”

The Rev. Amanda Conley
Preacher

February 26, 2023

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

Psalm 32

32:1 Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

32:2 Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

32:3 While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

32:4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah

32:5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah

32:6 Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

32:7 You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Selah

32:8 I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

32:9 Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

32:10 Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

32:11 Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

“The Truth About Forgiveness”

Psalm 51; Joel 2:1-2, 12-17; II Corinthians 5:20-6:10;
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Good morning beloved ones. I am very excited to be with you this Lenten season the first Sunday in lent kicking off our Sunday series on forgiveness.

Pastor Tim gave a wonderful sermon for the Ash Wednesday service and gave us a broad and sweeping understanding of forgiveness. How Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting it means believing in the fresh start before us. Forgiveness can be easily misunderstood. It is part of every moment. It inspires hope for our present and future. Forgiveness is integral to being Christian. We strive to be forgiven and forgiving. Today I hope to shed more light on the being forgiven part.

+++++

Pray with me: *Lord God, God of our hearts, bodies, minds, and souls —hide me behind the cross that we may experience you and your wisdom through my words and our meditation. Amen.*

+++++

Today I'm preaching on Psalm 32; Psalm 32 Verse 3 says: When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

So, where to start? Well, I lied to my therapist. But, Hear me out

I had been airing out my grievances and my betrayals. In all of which I was the victim.

I was pouring my heart and soul out to her about my struggles with other people. And I mixed in the perfect amount of humility when I'm talking to her to make it seem like I'm owning my part.

But then she got me.

It's that therapist school. It's like they have that one course that's called how to get your clients. They know just what to say to corner you, and they're cornering you into self-reflection.

If any of you have had or have a therapist, you might know what I mean. They lead you with the "tell me more about that's" and the "That sounds really hard"s and then bang!

"Hmm I wonder, it seems like maybe you hurt this person too, or have you noticed your behavior seems to lead this direction, how are you working on your part?"

"What part?" SHOCKED. I don't have a part Dr. Carol.

Said I was a perfect angel and then I kept my silence. What was that about?

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

But one thing that sticks out to me is the silence.

It sticks out to me because it resonates. Any time I've really felt shame and guilt for something/some betrayal or sin, and let it fester in me. I've made myself sick.

In my clergy group we are reading *The Book of Joy* by the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. In the chapter on forgiveness, it is discussed that feelings of resentment, anger, and hostility and hatred, as those can be extremely destructive in our lives. And when turned on us internally, can have physical and other impacts on our health.

I've lost sleep. I've beat myself up, up, up in my mind day in and out. I've tried to make it go away all by myself. Suppress. Conceal/don't feel says Elsa from frozen.

Why was the Psalmist silent? Many scholars, including Luther, believe that the Psalmist was silent due to pride, "I did not want to recognize or acknowledge my sin. I thought I was pious."

I was facetimeing my brother this week, and we chatted about this. And he said that the pain of acknowledging our wrongdoing and even venturing into forgiveness of self, means that **we did a bad thing**, and that we have to admit somehow that **we are a bad person**, just like the people who betray and hurt us.

That we have to face that we've fallen short. Harming those we love, harming our community, our environment, whatever it is.

And so, Silence. Now we/Psalmist could be silent for a myriad of reasons. **One scholar says that the silence could be due to "A deep, depression of pain or sorrow. Or maybe even fear. In any case, the effect is the same. Whether deliberate or imposed by the variations of life, "The silence is the rejection of grace.""**

How many of you have rejected grace through silence? By withholding due to our pride, fear, grief, our guilt, our belief that we deserve to feel horrific for the pain we've caused others.

Cycles of Silence go on until we disrupt them. We eventually and hopefully surrender to the fact that we need to talk about and face our pain and failings. Through confession.

Our Psalmist in 32 says, "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."

For those who don't know I am a hospital chaplain. And patients from time to time may confess their failings to me.

What surprised me was, one day I had a conversation with another staff person of color about a failing that ended up being something we both identified with. Our silence when we see racism and discrimination in our workplace. Unconscious or even conscious participation. We turned to each other in confidence, we broke our silence with one another. We brought to light our own darkness and deep fears.

Fear that we will be seen as "that black employee" or in my case black woman, who is angry, or overreacting, or emotional so we keep silent. Shame that we participate in a racist system, we keep silent. Guilt for internalized racism, unknowingly and at times shockingly overt, we keep silent.

Fear that our voices are not enough to herald change in this world, we keep silent. Fear that our voices are not enough in our own back yard, front yard, home court. Fear that we won't live up to the

trailblazing black leaders who went before us. I can't even lift my soiled hands to the Holy One. I am not enough.

Because if I say it out loud, I am that behavior, I am that bad deed, I am that mean spirited person, I am that black woman who has internalized racism and sexism and homophobia,

If I confess....

If you confess....

If we confess...

Maybe we will be able to breathe, to be seen, to be forgiven.

There are certain people in my life that I confess to. People who I trust, who hold me accountable, who love me, who show me the face of God.

And confession may look much different for each of you. It may be a prayer and a journal, it may be a best friend, your dog, a pastor, a chaplain, your spouse, your cousin.

Womanist theologian Dr. Katie Cannon would say forgiveness is not easy or immediate, and is part of healing in the face of oppression, injustice, sin. **The truth about forgiveness** is that it is a part of healing. We go from wasting away in the Psalm to being surrounded by songs of deliverance, Liberation!

Forgiveness comes after a sin, a mistake, a betrayal, an act of oppression. Forgiveness and healing go hand-in-hand, and because our healing has no timeline, forgiveness may not happen when we want it to happen, we may not be able to force it to happen, that includes forgiving ourselves, forgiving other people, and even our human ability to receive the ever-present forgiveness from God.

And if you're wondering, yes, eventually I did confess to my therapist. When I was ready to let go. When I was really ready to heal and change.

Even though forgiveness is integral to the Christian identity, it is not something that we can will into existence right now just because someone says we have to do it. Just forgive yourself. Stop beating yourself up! Just take this to God already!

It is work because healing is work. It is reflection. It is intentionality. It is discernment. It is change. It is justice, it is discomfort.

And if you've ever had a bad wound on your body. You know that healing can be itchy, bloody, scabby. It's not pretty. Why would our spiritual healing look any different?

Healing might mean something different to each and every one of us. And so, forgiveness may look a little different in each of our lives.

Lastly, What is astonishing and remarkable in this Psalm is not the confession and transformation of the psalmist, but the attentive ear of God who is ready and eager to forgive.

God is really awesome y'all.

She is the parent of all parents, the creator of creators.

It makes me think of the prodigal son/child trope in Luke 15:11-32. While the younger son struggles with how to go home, ashamed of what he has done and embarrassed to face his father again, the father runs out to greet his wayward son before the son says anything. So eager to be reconciled to his son, so ready to forgive, the father couldn't wait for the son's confession.

God forgives even the guilt of our sin...

A friend of mine a few weeks ago said that we often are so ruled by our emotions and what we feel. That our feelings so often create our reality.

God not only forgives the action or sin itself, but the residual emotional weight it carries inside of us, therefore relieving us of the burden of the past, the reality we thought we were living.

God transcends and removes the shame, the guilt, the embarrassment so that we can grow and move forward. Shame cannot live in the light of love and forgiveness. **Even me Lord, Even me, let some drops now fall on me.**

The radical gift in Psalm 32 is that God is waiting. God is waiting to forgive us, so no matter when that confession happens, no matter when we break our silence, no matter when we allow our spirit to be transparent before God, the forgiveness is there. There are transgressions big enough to cause great harm to us and others in this world, but there is no transgression too big for the forgiveness of God. **That's the truth about forgiveness.**

Amen.

Rev. Conley is Staff Chaplain at Grant Medical Center.

