

Midweek Lenten Vespers
15 March, Anno Domini 2023
Psalm 38

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved of the Lord,

Sin and guilt are far more than academic matters. They affect every fiber of your being. In Psalm 51 we consider the terrible weight that unconfessed sin bears on the soul. Tonight, as we hear David's cry in Psalm 38, we see that guilt consumes our entire being as we hear David lament the sorrow of his soul, unsound flesh, health, stinking and festering wounds, burning sides, a tumultuous and burning heart. Sin plagues the whole person. When the Law of God comes against us, the terror of eternal judgment squeezes the whole person - as though the very flames of hell were beginning to lick at our hearts and our flesh. And, truth be told, the judgment of hell is not just a sad or guilty feeling in your heart. The entire being of the condemned will suffer under the burning hot wrath of God.

It is only modern man's foolishness that dismisses this agony as some of kind of psychological issue that needs some talking through and some pills to fix. Unconfessed sin ravages you from the inside out. And if you take the Word of God seriously you will know this to be true because you will have felt it. You will know David's agony and you won't find his cries to just be over the top.

Let us also not forget that our physical and mental afflictions are also the result of sin. Some we bring upon ourselves by doing that which is contrary to God's Law and therefore contrary to creation. Others are results of the fact that sin has corrupted everything about creation. Everything is suffering the decay of death. Cancers, vertigo, blindness, aching knees and backs, hernias, migraines, strokes - every physical malady is an ever-present reminder that we are living in the valley of the shadow of death.

And notice that David even suffered the loss of his friends and loved ones over his sin. If this prayer was written after his sin with Bathsheba it is quite possible that there were people who withdrew from David in their disgust over what this anointed of God had done. Or they were utterly confounded by his profound sorrow and guilt. But whatever the reason, David's sin, as it always does, isolated David and left him alone with his guilt and the indignation of God.

But this is how God must deal with us if He is to save us. He must put to death everything in us in which we trust and leave us nowhere to run and hide. The Law has to pierce deep into our soul like the arrow of skilled hunter so that He can put to death our pride, our vanity, our self-justifications, and our illusions of innocence. Our sin is a truly wretched and God hates it with every fiber of His divine being. The sins that we commit on a daily basis either by the evil we do or the good we fail to do reveal a deep, deep infection that has spread throughout our entire being - both body and soul.

When we honestly and sincerely consider God's holiness and purity, His perfect goodness, His unwavering love and compassion and then consider our own lives in light of the Ten Commandments without trying to gloss over anything or make excuses, we can only be left wanting to abandon ourselves for the evil we see within. We can only be disgusted at our own lovelessness and faithlessness, our perpetual selfishness and idolatry, our bitterness and hatred. And the Law leaves no question - people like us do not attain to eternal life. St. Paul writes unequivocally "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10) David knew that. You know that. And that is why the terrors of God have fallen upon you and the pointed arrow of His righteous wrath has sunk deep in your heart, piercing to the division of soul and spirit.

And to make matters worse, the devil is near by constantly reminding you of your sins, even those you have confessed and been absolved of. Day after day the tempter holds before your eyes your great wickedness and rebellion against God and preaches the Law's unyielding accusations with the purpose of bringing you into utter despair and ruin for all eternity.

"But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11) Yes, you are guilty. You have sinned against the Lord and for your sin you have deserved His eternal wrath, you deserve to be cast into the hell of fire where neither soul nor body are spared any amount of suffering and pain for all eternity. But you were washed. Once the Law has done its work of exposing your guilt (and do not try to hide from it or cover yourself), you must become deaf to it. You must stop listening to it and open your ears to the promises of Holy Baptism wherein God washed all of that guilt away such that He has promised to never look at it again. That isn't the same

as pretending that you didn't sin or treating it as a small matter. Acknowledge it in all of its wretchedness. But no more than that. It is not a god. It's wretchedness cannot be compared to the rich mercy of God which poured out of the veins of Jesus to atone for your sins. The Lord Jesus has forgiven you all your sin. He is the God of your salvation. Not your sin. Not your works. Not your repentance or your sorrow. Jesus of Nazareth whose perfect innocence bore your guilt. "There is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12) Listen to the one Jesus sent to you who says to you in His Name and by His authority "I forgive you all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the +Son and of the Holy Spirit." By those simple words, spoken by simple, sinful men, your humble and gracious Savior binds up the wounds of your sins. The Holy Spirit creates us anew with the life-giving Gospel which raises the crushed in spirit to new life and brings soundness to our soul and our bodies once again.

And, yes, just as our sin encompasses both our bodies and our souls, so also does our salvation. We confess daily our faith in the resurrection of the body. When Jesus forgives sins, He promises the purification of your soul and your body. In Psalm 51 David prays "Let the bones that you have broken rejoice." Indeed they will. You know that your Redeemer lives and at the last you will stand upon the earth. And after your skin has been thus destroyed, yet in your flesh you shall see God, whom you shall see for yourself and your eyes behold and not another. Sin and death will not have the final say over your soul or your body. You will be raised with a glorified body like your Savior, prepared for enteral life where you will never know sin or death ever again. Your ears will be perpetually opened to hear the glorious voice of God and your mouth will be opened to sing His praises and rejoice in your salvation.

This is the promise of forgiveness. This is what being forgiven means. This is why Christians love to confess their sins - because they love to hear God's forgiveness. It is that which brings the deepest and purest and most abiding peace because it opens the gates of paradise and makes straight the way to God. It removes all fear of His wrath and judgment and instead fills us with the knowledge of His love and mercy. It raises us from the death and terror of sin to the life and joy of Christ. God grant each of you to know in both body and soul the true and everlasting joy of His forgiveness.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.