

“What is Good About Confession”

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; I Timothy 6:6-19

September 29, 2019

Today's scriptures present both challenge and hope. They root our hope in our relationship with God. Those who commit themselves to God's cause can imagine futures and act on their imagination, even if the arc of imagination goes beyond their lifetimes. They can face illness, external threat, and death knowing that God's providence encompasses them. Life apart from a relationship with God eventually leads to hopelessness, especially in the context of life's limited situations. ***So what is the quality of that relationship??***

First, when we make that Good Confession, we are connected to our brothers and sisters; we are supported by our church body; we are emboldened to go forward, sometimes in ways that are new ways, sometimes in ways that feel like an experiment, because we have never done it that way before. Sometimes that gives us a sense of adventure, trying new things.

You are a body that took a risk in trying a new thing by calling an Interim Pastor. You trusted a small circle of people to call strange, new person, someone who had never met before, to help you look at yourself in new ways, and to see who you really are. We've shared a time of realizing your Good Confession: of reaffirming the truths on which you stand, and of knowing what it is that you have to share with the world. You are very good at making people feel welcome when they come into this place, excellent at sharing the wonder of how it feels to stand on that rock of solid faith, profoundly effective in declaring who your Lord and Savior truly is. That is what really matters.

I remember a story that Bruce Reyes Chow tells from his early days in ministry at a prestigious Presbyterian Church. This particular tall steeple church wanted a young, energetic, creative pastor who would help bring in the younger families. They were sure they had their great new pastor. But Bruce tells about how he went in for worship one morning, in a bit of a rush to be sure everything was set up just right. He noticed the flowers might not be in exactly the right place..., on a table off to the side, but it was almost time to begin. So he left everything as he had found it, and proceeded with worship. Well, the next morning, an older woman was in his office waiting for him when he arrived. As soon as he crossed the threshold of his door, the woman was on her feet exclaiming: “You realize the flowers were NOT in the proper place yesterday?!”

Bruce answered: “Well maybe... but I didn't think it really mattered that much.” “What?! You didn't think it ***mattered***?!”

Bruce knew immediately that he had struck a raw nerve. “I'm sorry. I can see that where the flowers are placed really means a lot to you. We'll get it right next week.”

When we reflect objectively, we know that it truly doesn't really matter where the flowers are placed, where the pulpit is positioned, or which pew we sit in - although I know that can be a special thing here. And that's okay. But letting go of some traditions that keep us clinging on to a practice that blinds us limits our wonder for the new things God wants us to experience.

Relationship to Christ is connected with hope for the future. This hope emerges from a holistic spirituality in which ethics, enjoyment, and prayer are interdependent. Living a good life and enjoying God's bounty accompanies careful compassion, placing the needs of the whole and of our vulnerable neighbor on par with our sharing the Good Confession for what God means to each one of us, and to all of us.

Third, in writing to Timothy, and addressing other brothers and sisters in the faith, Paul is also saying that ultimately the community that God has called is with him, even when it seems like it's not. You see, brothers and sisters, it is with those seated to your right and to your left, in the pew behind and in the pew in front, that you find the community to which God has called you, the community the Spirit has gathered. We're not perfect. We fall short. We don't always support one another, and we often feel isolated even in a crowded city like Charlotte and in a big church. But our story doesn't have to end in isolation. Instead, with our God-given strength, we can be community with one another, neighbor to each other, brothers and sisters, who, by God's grace, offer support and help, encouragement and hope, in the trying times and in the times we feel most jubilant.

Cook's Memorial is full of the Good Confession, the love and truth that comes from Jesus Christ. It needs to also be the kind of love that flows out of the doors to the point that people might begin to notice: have you noticed how they care for each other, how they visit the sick, take food to people recovering from surgery, and bring their neighbors who need a ride? They have a message to share that they can simply not contain! All of you at Cook's are really good at sharing this Good Confession with one another, and you need to do a little more of making sure those who are not here feel welcome - that it really matters to you when they are away.

The people in Jeremiah's day were heart sick and grief stricken. If tears poured from their eyes like the water of a fountain, they would not be enough to restore the nation. The Psalmist also cries out for healing and renewal. And then Paul reminds Timothy how necessary it is for the early church to not only speak a Good Confession, but live it, every day. God has not left them, and God has not left us. We must practice our Confession, and put it into action.

Some of you may remember the closing comments of Rodger Nishioka when he preached at the presbytery meeting in July. After reviewing some of the timidity and reluctance the church can sometimes resemble in uncertain times, he pretty much declared: "Come On, Church, you've got this! You know who you are and what it is you need TO DO!" In other words, Let's make our Good Confession, not resting in the everlasting arms, but shouting from the mountain top the unfathomable love that comes from Almighty God for each and every one of us!