

EPIPHANY 6  
February 12, 2012  
Text: Luther's Small Catechism  
Theme: "I Am Not Afraid!"

***What is confession?***

**Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.**

***What sins should we confess?***

**Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts.**

***Which are these?***

**Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?**

**Have you ever wanted a "do over" button for life? What if we could take a mulligan whenever we wanted to? That word "mulligan" in golf has several stories behind it but they all involve some guy with the last name of Mulligan taking a second swing at the golf ball without having to count the first swing in the score. Imagine getting out of bed every day and being able to push the mulligan button and everything you did wrong yesterday is undone and forgotten. Well, that is exactly what we have in confession.**

**It seems as though many Christians have the mistaken notion that confession is somehow something we do for God. Some think that God is angry with them until they say certain words, grovel a little and then do some sort of penance. And the point of penance is to repay God for something you messed up and to inflict pain of some sort upon yourself**

to in essence “get a spanking for being bad.” After you have paid your debt and received your punishment, then God will forgive you. But that is not how it works.

When I was nine years old, I spent the summer with my Aunt Carlene and Uncle Elbert in the mountains of North Carolina. Uncle Elbert delivered cookies for Finest Foods of Virginia and I was his sidekick. He paid me \$2.00 a day to help him deliver cookies which really amounted to being good and not breaking anything. In 1972, I felt like a millionaire with \$2.00 in my pocket. I loved earning that money and feeling like I was king of the world.

We tend to transfer that feeling to our relationship with God. We want God to pay us for being good and not breaking anything. So we think of confession as our work that will settle accounts with God. It sounds like a good idea, except that it is impossible. Every sin is damnable and the price for even one sin is a soul so obviously we would run out of currency very quickly. Life with God is not a ride on the cookie truck and life under that model leads to one of two things: either we think that we are pretty good and deserve eternal life because we have earned it, or we sink into the despair of never being able to be fully forgiven and resign ourselves to damnation.

Confession is our mulligan. It is our giant “do over button.”  
Confession is remembering that the debt for everything we ever did or

**ever will do wrong was paid on the cross when Jesus suffered, died and was damned in our place. So we can rise every day and make the sign of the cross which reminds us that we live always under baptismal grace. Corporate confession, which we do here in worship, is a summary of our daily confession where we get to consider what we did not do right and publicly proclaim that we want a do over and have received a do over.**

**If I believed that I was on the hook for every sin I commit until I say the right words and perform the right action, I would live in constant fear. How could anyone be sure of his salvation? What if you forgot a sin? What if you sinned in your dreams and didn't remember it? But that is the beauty of a Christian life. ALL of our sins have ALREADY been paid for. God is satisfied with Jesus' atonement for our sin on the cross. That means that confession is not for God – but for us. Look at our Introit for today. The Psalmist says:**

**Light dawns in the darkness for the upright; he is gracious, merciful, and righteous.**

**Praise the LORD! Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!**

**Wealth and riches are in his house, and his righteousness endures forever.**

**He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the LORD.**

**His heart is steady; he will not be afraid, until he looks in triumph on his adversaries.**

**He has distributed freely; he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever; his horn is exalted in honor.**

**He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in Yahweh.**

**In fact, he will not be afraid at all. Why? Why will the man who fears the Lord not fear anything else? Because he never does anything**

wrong? No, we should have ample proof for that in our own lives. Because he will never suffer consequences for what he does wrong? No, forgiveness of sin has nothing to do with earthly consequences. And that is where we get all confused.

Every child, when faced with discipline, has tried the phrase, "But I said I was sorry!" We too live that lie as though saying magic words will remove practical consequences. That's why it is important for parents to impose natural consequences. Why would I ground a child for backtalk? That's punishment not discipline. If you talk back to me then I will use my power to make your life miserable. Rather back talk requires more talk not less. If a child back talks, I want to know why? I want a lengthy and prolonged conversation to discuss what seems to be a lack of respect and perhaps feeling of being unloved. How does sending the child to his room accomplish anything – except the prevention of homicide which I understand is sometimes a necessity. God never punishes us. He punished Christ for us, but he does allow us to sit with the natural consequences of our sin. If I cheat on my taxes and have to pay a fine, God will not deliver me from the IRS. He already has forgiven me and he constantly gives me the strength to endure all the challenges of life but good and bad consequences are natural progressions of choices both good and bad. But forgiveness is always ours.

**Forgiveness seems too simple. We want a system to work in which we can be in control. Naaman too thought it sounded too easy. Wash and be clean. Who ever heard of leprosy being cured by washing seven times in the Jordan River? So we attach ideas to confession like, you have to be truly sorry for your sin. You have to confess all of your sin to a priest or in worship. You have to pay a price for your sin. There are a million things people have tried to add to confession because God's way seems too simple.**

**There are no strings attached. There is no judgment of your motives for desiring forgiveness. Your sin was already forgiven on the cross and confession is your mulligan. We get to start fresh with God anytime we want to. We proclaim that fact in confession and God proclaims it back to us, through me, in Absolution. And that is why we have no fear. God is always with us and God is always for us.**