

THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

GIVE ME ALL YOUR SORROW

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 342

FORGIVENESS FOR A BROKEN WORLD



There in God's garden
stands the Tree of Wisdom,
whose leaves hold forth
the healing of the nations:
Tree of all knowledge,
Tree of all compassion,
Tree of all beauty.

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 342, stanza 1*

Carla Blakley writes...

My life as the Prodigal Daughter (*Based on Luke 15:11-32*)

My parents left on a holiday the day after I, at sixteen, received my drivers licence. Given my relative inexperience, they told me I was not allowed to drive while they were away. My older brother was instructed to give me a lift when necessary. I cringed as my friends joyfully embraced their independence and cruised around, while my independence sat idle, just like the car in the garage.

One day, I happened upon the spare set of car keys and the sound of them jingling in my hand begged me to take the car for a small spin. I could just go around the crescent. Who would know? What would it hurt? *Yes!*

I headed to the garage to back out the 1978 Buick Estate Wagon, a beauty, complete with wood panel sides and green vinyl interior. Oh the freedom! *Finally*, driving on my own!

The windows were down. Dad's CBC station was re-tuned to the latest rock music and my shades were on. *This was the life!*

As I went around the crescent for a second time lamenting the 40 kilometer speed limit, my thoughts turned to the expressway, and the 70 kilometers per hour speed limit. Imagine the wind blowing in my hair. What could it hurt?

Well the expressway was delightful and it led to downtown Regina, where the Bay Parkade had the coolest exit ramp. The ramp spiraled down and down, round and round. Up I went to park the car.

Now the 1978 Buick Estate Wagon is the equivalent of a Canadian Forces tank, and the parking stalls seemed incredibly small. I pulled the Estate Wagon around ready to plunge into the parking stall when I realized that my front fender was hung up on the back fender of the car next to me. Now what? I remembered my Dad freeing the stuck vehicle, in the winter, by rocking it. So I tried that. My fender and the fender of the small car crumbled, and I was still stuck on it. In an instant, the largest police officer possible, was standing at my window asking for my licence and registration. He smiled when he saw the date I received my licence—less than a week before. He did manage to unhook my vehicle and, sheepishly, I drove my Dad's crumpled Buick Estate Wagon home. The windows were rolled back up, the rock station re-tuned to CBC, and the sad classical music played like a funeral dirge.

I parked the car back in the garage and worried. It would be two weeks before my parents returned. It did not take too long for my older brother to find the damage on the car. According to him, I would be grounded until I was forty. Life had ended. In order to buy my brother's silence—at least until my parents returned—I took over all his chores. Each phone call from my Dad was painful. "Yes, Dad. Everything is just fine!"

The two weeks passed incredibly slowly. It was now the day my parents were to return. How would I tell them? My brother reveled in my pain as only older brothers can. Then my parents arrived.

I waited in the kitchen and heard them come in the front door. My eyes filled with tears and it felt like I was looking through a fish bowl. I had an apple-sized lump in my throat. I heard my brother talking to my parents. Something about... looking in the garage. The back door opened and the house was silent. I heard the threesome return and my Dad came around the corner into the kitchen. I burst into tears, ready to face my life's grounding. What a pitiful sight I must have been.

Next thing I knew I was wrapped in my Father's arms. "There, there now", he said.

When grace and forgiveness are extended to you, it is something you never forget!

My older brother tried to interrupt the moment, speculating on my punishment. My Dad told him to be quiet. My parents gave me a gift which they had brought back for me. We ordered-in pizza and celebrated their return.

I have not forgotten this experience and now, as a pastor, I am thankful that I have an opportunity to extend grace and forgiveness to others through the rites provided in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

I am especially interested in highlighting the rite of Individual Confession and Forgiveness.

See how its branches
reach to us in welcome,
Hear what the Voice says,
"Come to me, ye weary!
Give me your sickness,
give me all your sorrow,
I will give blessing."

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 342, stanza 4*

Come to Me, Ye Weary

The eyes looked so deep, black and lost; the face permeated with sadness; the hands clenched, wringing. The tension is thick in the room. "Pastor, I have to talk... to tell... someone."

I wait. I tell them it will be okay.

The eyes... they question... they fear judgment. Afraid.

The mouth opens, lips are licked but the words are wedged in somewhere deep and can't come out.

I wait. I tell them it will be okay. I say, "*You have come to make confession before God.*" (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 243: Individual Confession and Forgiveness)

Again the mouth opens, lips are licked and a word manages to come un-wedged and slips out. "I...", the deep, black, lost eyes frost over with tears.

Give Me All Your Sorrow

I wait. I tell them it will be okay.

The tears break forth and flow.....and the person begins.

Merciful God, I confess...

Whether the lost eyes and quiet, tumbling words belong to man or women, young, old, rich or poor, black or white, gay or straight... Whether... God hears them. God hears them even if they are barely audible. God hears them.

I... I... I'm having...

I had...

I am afraid...

I can't...

I stole...

I don't love...

I hurt...

I'm addicted...

I hate...

I am...

We fill in the blanks with our own stories, our own private pain.

I Will Give Blessing

I wait, I reach out for the hands, I wait until they eyes can look straight into mine and in a moment of true grace and love, God's powerful words come:

"Cling to this promise: the word of forgiveness I speak to you comes from God. In obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Individual Confession and Forgiveness*, page 244)

The eyes, they always tear, but the tears now are different. Cleansing. I can see that the words from God have entered their body and found their heart. I can see words gently cradling their heart, rocking it and putting to sleep the fear, guilt and shame which had held sway for days or weeks, months or even years. The tension lifts. Peace has arrived.

"The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your heart..."

Confession Reconnects Us With God

A friend of mine, a professor of social work, was surprised when I told her that the Lutheran Church has a rite for Individual Confession and Forgiveness. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 243) Usually, when we think of private confession, we think of the television image of the Catholic confessional booth with the priest hearing the words "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned."

When I explained how I have used the rite for individual confession, she observed that we were privileged to be able to take advantage of such a ritual. The healing aspects of such a rite often exceed the benefits of hours of counseling—not that counseling is not warranted or is not desirable in many situations. However, confession is a wonderful—albeit, often-forgotten or little-employed—tool for healing. Individual confession is a form of pastoral care that promotes good mental and spiritual well-being.

Martin Luther would agree with my friend, he was a strong proponent of private confession, he states:

Of private confession, which is now observed, I am heartily in favor, even though it cannot be proved from the Scriptures; it is useful and necessary, nor would I have it abolished; nay, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences." (*Three Treatises*, page 212)

When private confession was at risk of being abolished, Luther preached:

I will allow no one to take private confession from me and would not give it in exchange for all the wealth of the world. For I know what consolation and strength it has given me. No one know what it can give unless he has struggled much and frequently with the devil. I would have been strangled by the devil long ago if confession had not sustained me. (Ronald Rittgers, *Luther on Private Confession*, page 313)

Our baptismal font is filled with water. In the water are small glass beads, the kind found in the craft or flower arranging stores. The beads come in many colors but I use the clear glass ones as, out of water, they so clearly look like a droplets of water. In private, I have held the hands of a penitent over the

baptismal waters, and slipped their hands into the water at the point of forgiveness. There is something wonderfully profound about feeling the water at this point. I then invite the penitent to take several “water drops” home to place on their bedside stand, at their bathroom sink, on their dash board or in their change purse or pocket. The “water droplet” becomes a tangible reminder of the baptismal water and its promises of forgiveness, love and God’s liquid grace.

In Luther’s words, private confession was “a means of returning to the inexhaustible supply of grace one received in baptism.” (*Luther on Private Confession*, page 314) A wonderful suggestion for clergy is to set aside blocks of time, at appropriate times of the year, where the rite for Individual Confession and Forgiveness is offered for all who seek reconnection.

In 1 John 1:9 we read, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” These words are echoed in the rite for Corporate Confession and Forgiveness (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 238). (Take note: *Corporate Confession and Forgiveness* is different from the Confession and Forgiveness which is an optional element of the Gathering rite in Holy Communion. See *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, pages 94, 116...). If we are to encourage spiritual and mental health in individuals then the corporate health of our congregations should also be taken seriously.

It is suggested that Corporate Confession and Forgiveness may be used “on penitential days, such as the final days of lent, or as part of the regular schedule of the congregation. Occasions suggesting its use include the reconciliation of those estranged from one another; the confession of sharing in corporate wrongs; and a time of lament in the life of the congregation, the community, the nation or the world. Selected portions may be used when a fuller order for confession and forgiveness within another service is desired.” (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 238).

All heav’n is singing,
“Thanks to Christ whose passion
offers in mercy
healing, strength, and pardon.
Peoples and nations,
take it, take it freely!”
Amen! My Master!

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 342, stanza 6*

Confession —whether corporate or individual— reconnects us with God. We are welcomed into the arms of God and reunited with “the inexhaustible supply of grace one received in baptism.”

Carla.

Bibliography

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Pastor Carla Blakley serves the community of Christ Lutheran Church, Regina, Saskatchewan.

In 2002, the ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship invited a number of bishops, pastors and teachers to write a series of pastoral letters under the title "Reclaiming Our Birthright: Pastoral Letters on the Every-Sunday Celebration of Holy Communion."

Introduced by Bishop Raymond Schultz, the letters had a two-fold thrust: They were designed to assist pastors and congregational leaders in their reflection and teaching on the matter of every-Sunday Holy Communion and to help the people of God to faithfully and deliberately reclaim their baptismal birthright.

These essays, together with all of the essays in this The Road Where Faith Is Found series, are available on the ELCIC + Worship Matters page at Lift Up Your Hearts www.worship.ca.