

Psalm 32:1-7

¹ Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
² Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
³ While I kept silence, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
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.**
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.
⁷ You are a hiding-place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

¹² But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; ¹³ esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴ And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. ¹⁵ See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. ¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ **pray without ceasing**, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise the words of prophets ²¹ but test everything; hold fast to what is good; ²² abstain from every form of evil.

Luke 5:15-16

¹⁵ But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many **crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.** ¹⁶ **But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray.**

Living Faith Fully

"I'm only human" is a phrase that I'm not particularly fond of. A doctor spends hours in the ER trying to save a dying person and fails to do so, you may hear a nurse or the doctor's spouse say at some point, "You're only human." That's okay; that is consoling someone who is feeling depressed about the loss of a human life under her or his care, but I don't know if you would hear that same doctor say, "I'm only human." "I'm only human" is an expression most often used by someone to excuse behavior that could have been avoided. Like a man who is unfaithful to his wife. "Hey, I'm only human." Like the person who is audited by the IRS and discovered to have several tens of thousands of dollars in undisclosed revenues; "Hey, I'm only human." Someone who takes a bribe to cast a vote for a candidate. "Hey, I'm only human."

"Hey, I'm only human" is, when you think about it, an insult to God, isn't it? If we stand before God to account for our actions, would we say to God, "I'm only human"? Wouldn't God respond by saying, "What do you mean, **only** human? I created you in my image!" He created us to be stewards of the earth, to love one another, to live in peace with one another. "Hey, I'm only human" is kind of like casting blame on God. It's telling God, "You didn't create me well enough; it's your fault I sinned, God."

Last week we looked at the story of this poor woman caught in adultery who is brought before Jesus for sentencing, and when Jesus says that whoever is without sin should throw the first stone, the accusers leave the scene one by one. To their credit they were able to admit that they had at some point in their life done *something* wrong though I don't know if they were ready to admit every sin that they had ever committed. Most people would confess to some sin in their lives, but most would also underestimate their own sinfulness. Instead of readily and humbly admitting their transgressions, they either make excuses for it ("Hey, I'm only human"), which as we see is really blaming someone else for it, or they deny having done anything wrong at all – no remorse, no shame, no taking responsibility for our own actions. I've been watching a British detective series lately called "Inspector Lewis" and the disturbing thing about so many of the murderers in this series is their denial of guilt, their rationalizations ("By killing these people I am actually saving more lives" or "That person deserved to die" or some such tripe to use British term).

Denial of responsibility for our sin or rationalization of our sin or blaming others for our sin are all signs of our own sickness – taken to an extreme these ways of avoiding responsibility are all traits of mental illness. And any form of denial of sin is a definite indicator of *spiritual* illness. It's true enough that we all sin, and it's also clear from our avoidance techniques that we are not comfortable with our sin. So what should we do about it? The answer is quite simple: YOU TAKE IT TO GOD. Should you be afraid of bringing your confession to God? Yes! Absolutely! But remember what the Good Book says; "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Why? Because in fearing God you acknowledge that there is a God – it's no coincidence that people who take no responsibility for their behavior are more likely to deny the existence of God; it's easier to deny sin if there is no God who determines right and wrong. But if you deny sin, if you deny God, you close yourself to any work that the Holy Spirit needs to perform in you; you prevent yourself from being the person God created you to be.

The right course of action in dealing with our sin is to approach God with it, even though you fear doing so, because the consequences of not doing so are enormous. Read what the Psalmist writes in our Old Testament lesson:

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

I interpret "keeping silence" as refusing to confess your sins to God.

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

This is a description of a kind of mental illness, to feel God's wrath is exhausting; it drains you of strength.

⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;

I finally got around to PRAYING!

**I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord',
and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Guess what? God is loving and merciful. He doesn't want you to feel his heavy hand upon you. He wants to lend his hand to guide you.

⁶ **Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you;**

Ah yes, all who are faith FULL.

What does it mean to be faithful? I think of this as 2 words; FAITH and FULL. You have faith in God, not simply in his existence but in his imminence. He is here, now, when I need him, and even when I don't think I need him. That's the FULL part. I am FAITH FULL; FULL OF FAITH IN GOD. THAT'S WHY I BRING MY SIN BEFORE HIM; If I've sinned it means I haven't been faith full, and the less time I spend with God, the less faith full I am, and it shows in my behavior. How many of us have felt, after skipping prayer time or devotional time for days or weeks or years that life isn't going as smoothly as it should? Perhaps that's God's hand upon you reminding you that you've gone down the wrong path.

Those who are faithful offer prayer to you because they ARE faith FULL. Those who are FAITH LESS make excuses for their iniquities like “I’m only human,” or “I didn’t ask to be born.” They cast off the blame, but unfortunately they can’t cast off the heavy hand of God, and they lose their minds. Worse yet, they lose their souls.

Paul urges us in the Epistle lesson to “pray without ceasing.” If you do that it pretty much assures that you will be bringing any of your transgressions before God, but it also assures much more than that. Some people imagine God to be nothing more than a Purell dispenser, like you see in the hospital, but it’s Purell-for-the-soul. You go to God, he dispenses a little dispensation, and you’re good to go until you get dirty again. God is much more than a sin sanitizer; God is a guide. God is a counselor. God is a comforter. God is an encourager. God wants you to have nothing less than the full life he created you to live however long that life may be. Paul tells the Thessalonians much more than “confess your sins.” He speaks of respecting one another, encouraging one another, being patient with one another. Why? Because that’s what God does, and that’s what God wants us to do, and the more time you spend in prayer the better you are at living the way God wants you to live.

Finally I would just like to point out how important prayer is by looking at our Gospel lesson. It seems to me that by far the biggest reason people came to see Jesus when he walked this earth was to be healed or cured of some sickness, to see again or walk again, to be cleansed of leprosy or some other such disease, and Jesus for the most part accommodated them, healed them, cured them. “But he would withdraw to a deserted place and pray.” The one guy who had no need to confess his sins before God nonetheless needs to take time out from the commendable work of curing diseases, find a quiet place, and pray. Sometimes to “pray without ceasing” means you have to take a little time away from your work, as important as it may be, and spend some quality time with God.

To summarize we need to “fess up” to our sins and bring them to God, as frightening as that may be; God will hear your confession and grant you forgiveness. Second, we need to be conscious of God’s perpetual presence; get used to it. Know that he sees all and hears all. Be in dialogue with God throughout each day. Finally, spend some quality time with God. Give God time each day to help you see “the big picture” and show you what direction you need to take.