

Today's lessons have made me think about WHY we need to confess our sins. I used to think that we need to confess our sins to obtain forgiveness for them. And this is probably true, in a human sense. If I were to bop you over the head, wouldn't I need to confess my sin to you and ask for your pardon before you would forgive me? However, I now don't think that God works this way. Our gospel lesson tells of a divine love so great that we are forgiven already before we even ask.

Listen again as I retell our gospel lesson:

Let's suppose you each are computer programmers. AND your special talent—in fact all of your work experience—is in programming ABC systems. This would have been fine, for a while, when ABC systems were all the rage. You would have raked in the dough, and would have had your pick of jobs.

BUT, as these things go, ABC systems are now obsolete, since XYZ systems are on the market. Sadly, though, you don't know how to program XYZ systems. Which is why you were let go (terminated) from your job last year.



You have been looking and looking for work, with no success. Things are grim. You've lost your home and you live on the street. Your clothes stink. You stink. In fact, the shame of being unemployed and homeless make you just want to curl up and die.

But THEN you hear that Bill Gates is in town. You know that HE owns a large computer corporation that employs many people. You have read in the paper that he is here to receive an award in a little white house just over here across the river.

With absolutely nothing to lose, you somehow manage to crash the event, even wearing your smelly clothes. You throw yourself at Mr. Gates' feet—literally—and begin to thank him lavishly for the job that YOU SAY that he has already given you. What do you think would happen next? Any ideas?



Well, if Mr. Gates is anything like Mr. Jesus, here's what would happen next. Mr. Gates would help you to your feet, introduce you to the whole assembled group as the new head of his entire software development effort. Mr. Gates probably would say, if he were channeling Jesus, that in fact you will be staying with him at his home in Seattle until the house that he is EVEN NOW building for you has been completed.

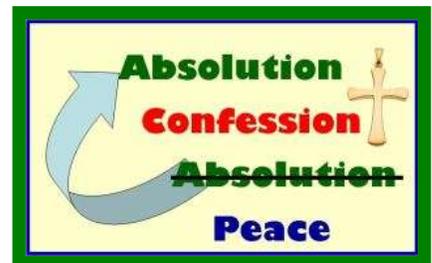
And, as Mr. Gates was shaking your hand and hugging you close, he would whisper in your ear that you probably should go ahead and apply for the job. This is the picture we see here, God's **absolute and abundant grace**, God's forgiveness before we even ask. God's love and mercy, rather than judgment.



In fact, if Mr. Gates were anything like Mr. Jesus, he would then turn to the host in that little White House just across the river and berate our President of these United States for not measuring up to his new Director of Software Development.

Is this analogy too far-fetched? I don't think so. There is a major timing issue hidden in our gospel lesson. I had long assumed that prior to this banquet Jesus had met and healed the woman who lavished her gratitude at his feet. But now I see that Jesus had not yet met the woman, that she had heard that Jesus was in town, and had crashed the party to thank him for something that he had not yet done, to thank him for doing something that she hadn't even yet asked him to do. What was Jesus' response? He did, in fact, heal the woman. And Jesus defended her to the host of the dinner party.

Some liturgical theologians say that if we really understood what God has done for us, we would place the Absolution of our sins first in our liturgy, even before we Confess what we have done wrong and before we confess what we have wrongly left undone. For example, in someone else's recent church newsletter article I read this:



In the bible, forgiveness always precedes repentance. The prodigal is welcomed; the leper is healed; and the tax collector is called. It is in response to such grace, already received, that we make our confession.¹

I am convinced. However, there are some who would reject the notion that God's forgiveness comes BEFORE we confess our sins. They get uneasy at the thought of all this freedom, uneasy about **God's absolute and abundant grace**. They are afraid that we will somehow take God's assured forgiveness as license to sin. And (they wonder) isn't that only one short and slippery step from us beginning to think that either 1) we don't have to ask God for forgiveness, or 2) there isn't really such a thing as sin? <HMPFH!>

I understand this reluctance to accept the extreme availability of God's grace. BUT I, myself, am counting on (depending on) **God's absolute and abundant grace**. We still need to confess our sins, though. This is because we feel guilty—most of us—when we have done something wrong that remains

unconfessed. And guilt kills us spiritually as well as psychologically, if we do not deal with that burden. So we need to carry through with our confession, not to somehow “activate” God’s forgiveness, but to rid ourselves of the guilt that comes from having fallen into sin.

Our Psalm today says this best:

While I held my tongue, my bones withered away,
Then I acknowledged my sin to you, [AND]
Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven,
and whose sin is put away!

Lest we get way too happy with the notion that God does, indeed, forgive our sins even before we confess them, let’s now turn to our Old Testament lesson. There we find no evidence that David was much troubled with his sins, which he most **grievously** HAD committed. First, he had had a sexual relationship with someone else’s wife, making her pregnant. And, if that wasn’t bad enough, David then murdered the woman’s husband—a soldier—by deliberately sending him into harm’s way in battle. King David had gotten away with all this, and he had married the woman. Who would know?



Well, God knew. God told the prophet Nathan, who showed up in David’s throne room with a message from God. “You should feel very, very guilty for what you did to Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite; why don’t you feel guilty?”

We don’t hear Mr. God assuring Mr. David of pardon here, do we? Maybe that is because David hadn’t thrown himself at God’s feet, like the woman did in our gospel lesson. Right here we need to remind ourselves that God had, in fact, forgiven David for his grievous sins. Right here is where we learn that there sometimes are dire consequence for our sins—consequences that seem so alien and foreign to us that we cannot even begin to understand the logic of how a kind and just and merciful God could have caused or allowed those consequences to happen.

Regardless of the consequences for his sin, God DID forgive David—HAD, in fact, already forgiven David when he told David what the consequences would be. And this is how God loves us, with guilt, with consequences, and with absolute and abundant grace.

¹ <http://stjohnsessington.com/news/newsletter.html>, newsletter of the Episcopal Church of St. John the Evangelist in Essington, Pennsylvania, for February 2013, accessed May 30, 2013.