

“Admitting Our Wrongs”

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Psalm 32:3-5

All the time I kept silent and my bones wasted away. I groaned day in and day out. My heart grew parched as stubble in summer drought, and at last I admitted to you that I had sinned and no longer concealed my guilt.

James 5:16

So confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, and this will cure you.

Matthew 5:23-24

... if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your sister or brother has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift.

I'm thankful that Laura could join us this morning to share with us some of her knowledge and experience. My hope today – without knowing what she was going to say ahead of time – is to offer some words that help us think more on what we have heard.

Today we continue our series on spirituality using Richard Rohr's book *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*.ⁱ

A few years ago, a pastor asks five therapists, each of whom were trained in different methods or schools of thought, to tell him everything they knew about addiction. Here's part of what he wrote afterward: “We like to think there are addicts and there are the rest of us. But the first thing [every person needs] to know is we are all addicts; every single one of us. There is a large spectrum of addiction and severity of addiction and some people function at greater levels than others, but we are all addicts.

“Addiction is a coping method that helps us avoid pain or anything that is too vulnerable, too shameful, too scary, or simply too much for us to handle.”ⁱⁱ

In recent weeks, we have admitted that only God can manage our out-of-control lives. We believe God can do this because God is so much more than we are. We long for God. To receive what God offers, we work to open ourselves, we accept that God's grace and love is a free gift, no strings attached. We face our shadow side, practice stepping out of the way, so that God's light can shine through us.

Having faced our shadow side, we find that we can now reveal our guilty secrets to God and to another. We admit “to God, to ourselves, and to another... the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Remember that our shadow side is not our evil side – merely that which we prefer nobody saw, including ourselves. But, having done our shadow boxing, and having worked to dismantle those less than perfect facets of our character, we are now ready to reveal these secrets.

An interesting thing about secrets. You can keep one buried within you for years, even decades, for fear of its ugliness, for fear that others would reject you if they knew. But once your secret is in the light, you usually find that it's not as significant as you thought it was. When you admit

your secret to God, you find yourself awash in an unending shower of God's grace. Then you find that you have the strength to tell someone else. Once you admit your secret to another human being, it loses its fear factor. It no longer has the power to control you.

We cannot heal what we cannot acknowledge. And whatever we cannot acknowledge will continue to control us. On so many levels, truth-telling is good and healthy.

The church recognizes sin, error, and failure to control our own lives as the beginnings of transformation and spiritual growth. We acknowledge our own powerlessness and lean into God's abundance. When we admit to another "the exact nature of our wrongs," we are enriched by the experience as we now each come face-to-face with God's love.

The prophet Ezekiel talks about truth-telling, accountability and restorative justice. He says God is true to Godself. This God-integrity is so great that God is not swayed by our missteps. God *always* acts with total faithfulness. This becomes the basis for our acceptance of God's radical grace, without which "grace would not be grace at all" (Romans 11:6).

Speaking for God, Ezekiel tells us, "I deal with you for the sake of my name and not according to your wicked ways and ruinous deeds" (20:44). This is amazingly good news! God always acts toward restoring God's children, restoring God's creation.

Taking this a step further, God does not wait for us to change to love us. God's love is not *if* we change. God loves us into growth and transformation. We usually get this backward. We think someone sins, they're punished. Then they repent and only afterward are they transformed.

In God's economy, when someone sins, God showers them with unconditional love. Because of this love, they are transformed, and only then do they repent.

Today, on this World Communion Sunday, we are asking ourselves, "Who do I have trouble accepting? On whom am I not practicing love?" The list of people we don't love, accept and embrace is long – though not all of them apply to any one person.

We resist loving queer folks. People who speak a different language. Conservatives. Liberals. People whose dis-ease or disability is different than our own. Immigrants. Politicians. People whose leadership style doesn't suit us. Foreigners. Millennials. Boomers. People who drive hybrid or electric cars, or those who drive SUVs. Muslims. Sikhs. Jews. City-folk. People who are prejudiced.

God's call through eternity is to love – first, last and always. When you admit to God the exact nature of your wrongs, what persons will you name? What faces will haunt you, knowing that you have chosen not to accept, embrace, and love them? Have you asked God for the courage to do your Shadow Boxing?

Jesus says, "If you remember that someone has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and make things right with them before you do anything else."

Who do you need to approach? At this time, as I prepare the altar for communion, I encourage you to make your peace. Go speak to that person. Get out your phone and text them. Or make an action plan for what you will do in the following days.

ⁱ This sermon borrows heavily from Richard Rohr's *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and the Twelve Steps*, Franciscan Media: Cincinnati, 2011, 37-49.

ⁱⁱ 12 Steps: Step 5 'Admitting Who We Are' 8/14/2016, firstpreseminence.org/new-blog/2016/8/23/12-steps-step-5-admitting-who-we-are-8142016