

## **Pastor Roy's sermon from Aug. 18, 2013**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Children's sermon: Saying we're sorry.

In our worship, we gather in the name of the God who is in relationship with all that is. Once we make room for God to be God, then we can admit that we are who we are without the need to pretend or hide. That is true confession. We enter every moment where we are and who we are. Our God is an "I am" God, and we are "I am" people. This is the stage from which we live our lives and experience God. "I AM."

Confession and Assurance go hand in hand. Confession is a new beginning. It is the beginning of everything that we do. God's assurance of love and mercy tells us it's ok to confess. It's ok to be true to ourselves. Assurance reminds us that God loves us exactly as we are. Where we begin, that is where God loves us. If confession is the stage from which we live our lives, assurance is the legs upon which the platform stands.

God, who assures us, invites us to know what is—starting with our self. We cannot know anything until we know who we are. So why is there a constant battle within to try to be someone whom we are not or feel shame for the person that we actually are. Here is the word of the Gospel: God knows us and enjoys us. We are all known and beloved.

So when we err and confess our error, our sin, this Grounding God forgives because this error, sin, falling short, brokenness, and woundedness. God is not shocked. God knows our weakness and enjoys relating to us. The creator accepts us as we are, calls us into merciful, life-giving relationship. God welcomes us so that we may welcome others with the welcome we have received. Forgiveness and assurance is the door through which we walk, the door through which we invite our neighbors to walk. We accomplish this not by being good or perfect, but by honestly engaging those around us with the same grace and mercy which God engages us, moment by moment.

See how foundational these early elements of our worship are? They form our lives. They give us hope to face each new day, each new moment. We are granted life by one who knows us, values us, and makes room for us.

Confession is much more about who we are and who God is, than about how much we have blown it, sinned, betrayed those we love, failed to care for our neighbor, and missed many opportunities. If confession is just about sin, see how we are like a hamster in an exercise wheel? We're not going to go anywhere. We cannot grow. We will fail to know who we are and the mercy of the God who calls us to celebrate life granted day by day. Every moment is a cause for celebration in relationship with our gracious creator.

What do our lessons today say about confession and assurance? Jeremiah says, "Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?" Jeremiah complains of the untruths, unfaithfulness of wayward prophets. Straw is not a substitute for wheat. The Word of God is true, and the word of God is mercy and love for those who receive it. The Word breaks in pieces our falsehoods, burns away the chaf of our illusions and self deception. The word of God is mercy and peace for all. Not just for me. But for my neighbor, too. The wayward prophets proclaimed an easy grace where

grace is received but not shared with neighbor. Grace which is not shared is not grace but greed and selfishness. The hammer of God's word cannot negotiate on the relational character of God's mercy.

Finally, the lesson from Luke reminds us of the difficult reality that when we practice the grace of God, there will be many who are disturbed by this grace and will part ways with us. Perhaps violently. I'm sure you've noticed how matters of faith sometimes divide friends, family, and neighbors? The old adage, "At work, don't talk about politics or religion." Both relate to faith because both affect how we live our lives in community and how we spend our money.

I summarize confession and assurance with two statements:

We confess who we are and how we live--every moment of our lives, not just at the beginning of our worship.

God's assurance of mercy and welcome is our foundation for living in love.

In other words, our confession is both ongoing and the foundation for grace filled living.

Amen.