

# Ash Wednesday Service, 14, 02, 2024

## *Lent: An Invitation to Know and be Known*

### **Introduction**

- Ruth Haley Barton writes, “I cannot transform myself, or anyone else for that matter. What I can do is create the conditions in which spiritual transformation can take place, by developing and maintaining a rhythm of spiritual practices that keep me open and available to God.”
- The paradox of transformation – I cannot transform myself; transformation will not happen if I don’t do anything.
- Spiritual practices are meant to be how we open ourselves to God for transformation.
  - We don’t hide.
  - We empty ourselves.
  - We allow ourselves to be seen and known.
  - We confront some things about ourselves that we would rather ignore.
- We like and emphasise reading Scripture, prayer, fasting, solitude, meditation, and others...
- But we rarely talk about Confession.
- Confession and Repentance as Lenten practices.

### *Read Text*

### **1. Confession**

- Have you ever heard someone say, “I am sorry for everything I did.”
  - Good confession of wrong.
  - You can get away with it because it doesn’t require that much from you... except humility.
  - ... but does not fully acknowledge what you did.
  - What is the “everything?”
  - Do you realise what exactly what you did?
- Confession gets us to name the “specific everything.”
- Opportunity to admit that I am the kind of person who does this thing.

- Not hiding behind Satan, emotions, a bad day, or anything else we can use as an excuse.
- Take full responsibility for what I do.
- Opportunity to notice and reflect on my actions.
- In confession, we meet the reality of our sin and failure to be truly human.
- David repeats over and over again that he has sinned.
- In verse 14 he names his “specific everything.”
  - It’s the sin of murder.
  - He didn’t literally kill the guy, but he set him on the path of death.
  - He doesn’t rationalize his decision but admits its fullest extent.
- What is your “specific everything” today?
- Take some time to name it in the paper.
  - It can be one or more.
  - It can be something you have struggled with for some time.
  - It can be a habit or an attitude.
  - It could have happened today, yesterday, or last week.
  - Name your “specific everything.”

*3 minutes of writing*

## **2. Repentance**

- Confession is for the sake of repentance.
- We confess so that we can do better.
- Confession is also a declaration that we do not want to be the person who does this thing.
- We declare that we want to be different people who do different things.
- We acknowledge that the direction we are in is not the right one.
- As our sign of declaring our repentance, let us burn the sin we are repenting from.
- As you watch your “specific everything” burn, let it be a new commitment to a different direction of your life.
  - A life defined by allegiance to the God who restores and makes us become true human beings.

*5-7 minutes of burning*

## **3. Grace**

- Confession is both judgment and grace.
  - The reality of judgment is possibly why we don't do it often and honestly.
  - We don't like admitting to ourselves that we were wrong.
- In the practice of confession, we meet the God of grace.
- This is the God who restores and make us true human beings.
- Since we confess our "specific everything" to God, we know that he loves and forgives us.
- David knew his God as a God of...
  - Mercy and loyal love (v.1).
  - Compassion (v1).
  - Who can clean and wash his sin (v2, 7).
  - Deliverance (v.14).
- It is because of his knowledge of God that David could open about his "specific everything."
- It is the same God who meets us today.
- He reminds us that we are loved, accepted, and forgiven.
- He gives us the grace of another chance tomorrow.
- Through his Spirit, he reminds us of our commitment every day.
  - Our task is to obey when the reminder comes.
- And that is how transformation happens.

## **Conclusion**

- The paradox of transformation – I cannot transform myself; transformation will not happen if I don't do anything.
- The spiritual practice of confession is one that gives us the opportunity to know ourselves.
  - We confront who we truly are... not who we hope we are.
  - In confession I realise that I am the kind of person who does this thing.
- In confession, we also meet the God of mercy, love, compassion, and forgiveness.
  - The God who accepts us for who we are.
  - The God who restores us so that we can become true human beings.
- May we live in this perpetual state of confession and repentance.