

**Pentecost 15 / September 10, 2023**

**Psalm 32:1-7**

**You are a hiding place for me**

Psalm 32 is a psalm of penitence. It extols the blessing of confession, forgiveness and absolution. Confession is the human acknowledgement of sin and sinfulness. Forgiveness is the mercy of God who covers over the guilt of human sin for the sake of his righteousness. Absolution is the Divine expression of forgiveness in a formal release from punishment associated with guilt. Repentance is the stated hatred of sin and the desire to turn from it. Absolution is the public, outward declaration of the forgiveness of sin so we may have the assurance of forgiveness and peace of a good conscience.

We begin our Christian worship with confession and absolution not because our sins are not otherwise forgiven, but as a reminder of Christ's sacrifice that paid the debt of our sin; and as the assurance that our guilt is covered over in the righteous blood Jesus shed on the cross and our sins are washed away in the waters of baptism into His death and resurrection, a cleansing, life giving flood. St. Peter writes, "Baptism which corresponds to the flood, now saves you...as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ." In Christ, God hides us from the wrath our sins deserve and blesses us with deliverance from eternal punishment and the peace of a good conscience.

A guilty conscience never rests. Awake or in sleep, a guilty conscience troubles the soul and wearies the bones. David had many sins that troubled his soul and wearied his bones. Trying to hide his sins from God made things worse. David sang, "When I kept silent my bones wasted away." He had no rest in his spirit and felt no peace in his soul, until He acknowledged his sin and confessed his iniquity. When he confessed his transgressions to the Lord and acknowledged his guilt, the Lord forgave his iniquity. He felt like a new man. A weight was lifted from his shoulders and again he felt joy in his heart. He sang, "Let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found." God is found in forgiveness.

We find God in forgiveness when we confess our sins and acknowledge our ongoing sinfulness. Trying to hide our sins from God only makes the guilt worse. There is no hiding place from God. God is our hiding place. We find refuge from the guilt of our sins in His mercy, promised freely to all who confess their need and come to Him for grace for the sake of Christ Jesus. When we take time to confess our sins, He covers our iniquity with Jesus' blood and righteousness. He lifts up our spirits and fills our hearts with His Holy Spirit, so we may walk in newness of life. He surrounds us with shouts of deliverance. Blessed is the one who finds shelter in the forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly He is our hiding place.

There is a saying, "Confession is good for the soul." Confession is good for the soul, because with the Lord there is forgiveness. In the world, confession does not necessarily bring forgiveness. People with guilty consciences will on rare occasions contact law enforcement agencies and confess to serious crimes. They can no longer live with the guilt and have to clear their conscience. They may clear their conscience, but the justice system will still hold them accountable for their crimes and prosecute them to the full extent of the law. The law won't forgive your trespasses even if you make a full and complete confession. On an interpersonal level, confession doesn't necessarily guarantee forgiveness. Your friend may or may not forgive the wrong you committed against her or him. Confession is good for the soul, because with the Lord there is forgiveness.

There is forgiveness with the Lord, because He is compassionate and kind. He does not hold our sins against us, because it is His nature to forgive. He does not seek to deal with us according to our sins, but according to the kindness of His love. Confession is good for the soul, because with God there is forgiveness for the sake of His mercy expressed fully in Christ Jesus. Confession doesn't earn or in anyway merit forgiveness from God. Forgiveness was earned by Christ Jesus through His sinless life, by which He proved Himself worthy to be our Saviour and His sacrificial death, through which He bore the penalty of our sin. There is forgiveness with the Lord, because in His compassion He gave Jesus His eternally begotten Son to bear our guilt and be our Saviour. Confession is the acknowledgement of our sin and our need for Christ to be our Saviour.

Absolution is the good news that in Jesus' righteous blood God forgives our sins and washes our guilt away. He is our hiding place.

David confessed His sin and sinfulness to God in the confidence that the Lord would hide him from the wrath his sin deserved. The hiding place of which he speaks is related to the cities of refuge the Lord provided for those who had caused unintentional death through accident or by negligence. Through Moses the Lord commanded that five cities of refuge be established in Israel, so that those who had incurred blood guilt could be protected from the avenger of blood, who would otherwise seek revenge for the family of the victim. Before there was a written code of law, families, clans and tribes secured justice for their members. Often the punishment they deemed sufficient exceeded what was just according to the crime. The Lord provided refuge from the wrath of the avenger of blood in these special cities that served as hiding places. They were symbols of the refuge sinners find in Christ, who hides us from the wrath of the law. Christ is our hiding place. He protects us from the wrath of the law. He surrounds us with deliverance from the guilt of our sins.

When people do something they know to be wrong, their first response is to hide, either themselves or their crime. When Eve and Adam sinned their first reaction was to hide from each other by covering their bodies with leaves. When they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden, they hid themselves among the trees. When we have a guilty conscience, we avoid the person we have wronged. We feel awkward in their presence. We hesitate to look them in the eyes. In C.S Lewis' novel "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," those who have betrayed the Lion Anselm reveal their guilt by averting their gaze when He looks at them. They can't look Him in the eyes. We can't hide our sins from God. He sees all. He knows all. Rather than seeking refuge from God, in Christ we find refuge in Him. He is our hiding place from the avenger of blood; our guilty conscience and the condemnation of the Law. He lifts our heads above the flood of waters that drown sinners. He surrounds us with deliverance.

David sings, "Surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him." The rush of mighty waters has special significance in the bible. It refers to the Lord's judgement on sin and His power to hide His people from judgement on sin. The Lord condemned the sin of the first world and rescued Noah and his family from its iniquity through the rush of many waters in the great flood. He hid them from the wrath of the mighty waters in the Ark. In the exodus the Lord hid Israel from the wrath of the Egyptians within the walls of water that surrounded them. The Lord condemned the sin of the Egyptians and saved Israel from their tyranny when the flood of the great waters returned to their course. The mighty waters washed sin and sinners away. They brought destruction to those who abided in sin and sinfulness. They gave life and deliverance to those who confessed their sins and called on the Lord for help.

The waters of the great flood, the waters of the Red Sea, the water we use to wash our bodies, corresponds to the water of Holy Baptism. In the waters of baptism, we are incorporated into the body of Christ and given refuge from the guilt of our sins and the condemnation of the sinful world. In the waters of baptism our sins are daily washed away and our souls cleansed from the sinfulness that abides within us. We come to God in confession for the sake of Jesus into whose death and resurrection we have been baptized. It is on the basis of His promise in our baptism that we have the assurance of forgiveness and the peace of a good conscience. In Christ, the Lord hides us from the rush of mighty waters that wash sin and sinners away. He gives us deliverance and peace. Christ is our hiding place.

God bless us with His Spirit that we may abide in Christ and turn to Him for grace and peace. In Jesus' Name Amen.