

Happily Confessing?
Psalm 32:1-7
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

It has been said that confession is good for the soul. And even though we may agree with that in theory, the reality is that very few of us like to actually engage in the act of confession.

I believe I've talked before about one Ash Wednesday service many years ago. My son was about 4-years-old at the time and sitting in the sanctuary next to me. As part of the service we invited people to write down something for which they were seeking forgiveness and to bring it as an offering. I explained in the best way I could to my young child what we were doing. I invited him to draw a picture or to have me write what he wanted to say. Rather than offering something up, he simply crossed his arms and with a scowl on his face said, "I don't like this."

More honest words have seldom been spoken.

We don't typically like to confess. Not to a person who we have hurt or even to someone about something we did that didn't impact them directly especially when we think it might change their opinion of us.

We don't like public confession. Although we sometimes enjoy tabloid stories about other people's sins, especially people we aren't fond of anyway.

We Protestants, who don't have a formal ritual of confession with clergy people are often proud of that reality, although we are also typically slow to even share moments of confession with God.

And yet, we claim: confession is good for the soul.

And our psalmist today proclaims, "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1, NRSVUE). Yes, happy.

Confession is good for the soul.

"Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven" (Psalm 32:1, NRSVUE) - which of course, we assume means confession happened, right?

And if we look at verse 5 in this psalm, we hear that as the psalmist writes, "Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin" (Psalm 32:5, NRSVUE).

And yet, while confession may be good for us, while those who are forgiven may be happy, who wants to volunteer to be the first one to unload their confession here today? I don't expect to see many hands go up.

After all, we learn at a young age that we are to hide, not only our sins - the ways we hurt others, the ways we distance ourselves from God - but even our imperfections that have nothing to do with sin, or even simply things about ourselves that someone else might not like.

Well before the days of social media influencers and picture perfect Facebook families, we knew what it was to put on our best, to have a public-facing-self who looked the part even if the reality behind that was nowhere close.

We have seen or experienced broken relationships between parents and children when someone didn't hold up their end of these family expectations.

We have sent women away to have children in privacy in another community out of public view, for generations forcing them to give those children up in order to uphold a perception that reproduction only happens in the confines of marriage.

Even when we speak about the importance of honesty, of creating safe and brave spaces, too often we still respond to people's truths with judgment, with words and in ways that are anything but safe.

And yet the psalmist reminds us of something important. The psalmist reminds us that we are healthier, we are better, when we are willing to be honest about who we are, even about the ways that we are broken, even about the ways that we have made choices we regret, even about the ways that we have stepped away from our best intentions toward God and neighbor.

The psalmist even acknowledges that our bodies feel better when we are willing to confess our transgressions. In verse 3 the psalmist writes, "While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Psalm 32:3, NRSVUE). Holding things in, the psalmist acknowledges, is not good for us.

So, what do we do with these conflicting realities?

What do we do with the fact that, at least in theory, we know that confession serves a purpose, that being set free of the burden of carrying secrets is actually good for us? But how do we do this when too often our honesty is met not with forgiveness and safe space, but with judgment and banishment?

In a recent post at "Piloting Faith" Rev. Cameron Trimble reflected on Peter's denial of Jesus, a story Christians are quite familiar with. You might remember that in that story Peter followed along when Jesus, having been arrested, was taken to be questioned by

the high priest. There, John tells us that warming himself at a charcoal fire, Peter, upon being recognized as a follower of Jesus, denied knowing him.

Cameron Trimble writes of a connected story later in John's gospel, one fewer of us are familiar with. She writes, "After the resurrection, Peter goes back to fishing. At dawn, he sees a stranger on the shore. When they come ashore, John notices another charcoal fire waiting for them, with bread and fish ready.

"Only John mentions that it's a charcoal fire. He wants us to notice the connection. **The first fire was where Peter lost himself; the second is where he finds himself again.**

"Jesus never asks Peter why he denied him or demands an explanation. He doesn't ask Peter to defend his choices or explain his compromises. Instead, he asks just one question: '*Do you love me?*' He asks it three times, once for each denial.

Trimble goes on writing, "This question goes beyond Peter's public failure and reaches something deeper. Before Peter was a disciple, a leader, or someone who made promises he couldn't keep, he was just a man who loved Jesus. Everything else got complicated, but that love remained. Maybe that's why Jesus starts there" (Cameron Trimble, "The Second Fire" at *Piloting Faith: An (Almost) Daily Meditation*, July 13, 2026, [The Second Fire - by Rev. Cameron Trimble](#)).

And perhaps that is exactly where we should start...with love.

What if we created communities where love was so strong that people truly felt safe sharing their most honest selves?

What if we created communities where people knew that they would always be loved no matter what sins they had committed?

What if we created communities where the idea of confession wasn't a burden to be avoided, but a gift to be received, as forgiveness and love allowed each one to be set free of the pressure of perfection and the need to hide their true selves?

What if we discovered that love freely given would set the stage for the joy and release that comes when we are free to confess, to receive forgiveness, and to let go of shame?

What if we discovered together that those who can speak an honest, even difficult word, those whose transgressions are forgiven, are indeed happy and whole? Amen.