

**Confess, Be Honest, Be Free** - Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Luke 13:31-35  
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A Sermon By  
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In today's gospel, Jesus weeps for his beloved Jerusalem, weeps for the city's unwillingness to turn toward God. If we loved our towns, our cities, our nation as well as Jesus loved his, we would also weep.

I want to talk today about confession, honesty, and freedom which are fundamental concepts in understanding the message of the Bible to us as individuals and as a society.

The Bible insists that confession and honesty are prerequisites to freedom. The scriptures are clear: ***if a person or a society wishes to be truly free then the sins of the past must be confessed honestly.***

In order to get at this subject I want to take one aspect of our society which I feel must always deal with in confession and with honesty if we are to experience real freedom. I could have chosen others but let's utilize the one I have chosen to get at our topic.

I wonder this morning, if Jesus were weeping for us today, in our society, what sin might cause Jesus the most grief, the most pain?

In his *The Trouble with Friendship: Why Americans Can't Think Straight About Race* (Grove/Atlantic, 1995), Benjamin DeMott notes that America's problems with race appear to be solved, at least at the movies, one-to-one. Whenever whites and blacks meet one another

on film or TV, we are usually friends. Probably the only touching aspect of the film, *Pulp Fiction*, (1994) is the charming friendship between two murderers, one black, one white. In *White Men Can't Jump*, (1992) a courageous white man, struggling to survive on the mean basketball courts of downtown L.A., is befriended by an understanding black protector. (The film was released the same year as the L.A. riots.)

See?

As we leave Black History Month 2010, it appears we don't have a racial problem in America. Look how we all get along in *Driving Miss Daisy*, *Forrest Gump*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Philadelphia*, *Sister Act* and most of our TV programming -- friendship between blacks and whites dominates our movies and our TVs.

During President George W. Bush's administration we had our first African-American Secretary of State in Condoleezza Rice and the first Black Secretary of Defense in Collin Powell.

In 2002 Halle Berry became the first Black woman to receive an academy award.

In 2008 we elected our first African-American, multi-racial, President in Barak Obama.

But in his book, Dr. DeMott, suggests that we need to look beyond these accomplishments and deeper into race relation in our country. He writes:

*Black infants die in America at twice the rate of white ... One out of every two black children lives below the poverty line (as compared with one out of seven white children). Nearly four times as many black families exist below the poverty line as white . . . More*

*than 50 percent of African American families have incomes below \$25,000. Among black youths under age twenty, death by murder occurs nearly ten times as often as among whites.*

If the story of Jesus, a man on death row in today's scripture, were told today in most states, the chances of his being black would be seven to one.

Quite a gap between Hollywood and Harlem. Washington politics and Washington's inner city. Big screen Academy Awards and Newark's Central (old 3rd) Ward.

The message of Hollywood and TV-land sells because it is a message we so desperately want to believe.

We want to believe that one day we had a problem with racism; white people didn't like black people; black people didn't like white people.

We want to believe that all that has changed since the 1950's.

We want to believe that whites came to the realization that they really like African Americans and African Americans came to believe they really liked white folk. That's what we want to believe, therefore, our guilt is lifted.

What we want to believe is so appealing because it is offered without cost, without mention or ownership of humanity's sordid past.

What it really is is culture wide evasion.

What it really does is make history irrelevant. "White Americans," said President Clinton, "are gripped by the isolation of their own experience. Too many simply have no friends of other races . . ."

I guess this means we are to forget economics, forget history,

and just make friends. But to forget dooms us to perpetuation and repetition. To gloss over the history of African American suffering in this democracy is to gloss over the political and economic facts that keep black and white America separated.

To admit to our history might mean to admit that we did not arrive over night where we are today in our racial struggle, so solutions will not come over night.

**First**, we must own history and discover that the image of black-white sameness, pushed upon us by the big and small screen, is a lie.

**Second**, if we truly want to resolve this issue, indeed any issue, we must confess to it and be honest about it. Only then can we be free from it.

Now, relating this social sin to our personal sins, let me say this. There was a time when we spoke, sometimes cruelly, of a woman "having a past." Well, we all have our individual pasts. The question is, How is it possible to live free despite our pasts? How is it possible to be honest about our personal past?

Here is where Christianity offers great assistance.

Christianity has always believed that honesty is impossible until you deal with the truth.

Christianity has always insisted that both personal and national history is irretrievable and also invincible unless it is told truthfully.

We are in the season of Lent where we spend a great deal of time reflecting on repentance.

Repentance means to turn around, to call to mind again that with which we have punished ourselves.

Repentance does not come naturally.

Repentance involves learning or recalling again our life story and practicing moves that are not part of the every day world in which we live.

Repentance means realizing, on the basis of the story of Jesus' betrayal by his own disciples, that we, like them, have a past, a past which we can neither deny nor undo on our own.

Where do we find the resources for honesty, particularly honesty about any part of our past which may be most painful?

Where do we find the resources for truthfulness about any part of our past which still impacts the living of our lives now?

What we need, in order to be honest and truthful, is some means of facing the facts without either hating ourselves for our past or hating those who remind us of it.

How can we be free?

My fellow Christians, remember, we are answerable to a story. Answerable to a story which says that God forgives. Even from the cross, God forgives.

That's our story.

The story to which we are answerable tells us that God is willing to take us back, regardless. But it is not a story based upon cheap graciousness; a cross is not cheap.

Christian forgiveness does not say that our sin is inconsequential or forgettable.

Rather, Christian forgiveness begins in God's amazing determination to have a family, in God's relentless pursuit of us even into the wildernesses of our lives.

During Lent, we attempt to become a part of the gospel story, a story that calls us to look upon our lives truthfully.

During Lent we are invited to tell our life story honestly.

During Lent we discover that God has made our personal stories and the entire story of humanity his story.

Only as forgiven people are we free to confess. Without the story of God's redemption, we are trapped in the eternal ritual of denial and falsification.

With God's story, embraced as our own story, we are free, we can breathe; those whose differences and history made them our enemies, become even more than our friends. They can become family.

In today's reading from the Old Testament, Abraham remembers the covenant, remembers who he is and who and what he is called to be. He assumes responsibility for his part of the covenant, and turns to God. We are members of that covenant, established by God. Our hope, in life and in death, is that God loves us, will keep covenant with us, even when we are unfaithful. That knowledge gives us the security, the basis to confess, to be honest, to be free. The road home begins with a Savior willing to offer bread and wine even to his best friends who met his giving love with betrayal.