

**Joy and Repentance** - First Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9  
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A Sermon by  
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I read a book a few years ago, a book on the church's doctrine of original sin. I don't remember very much about the content of the book, but I will never forget its title: *The Joy of Being Wrong*.

The joy of being wrong!

Where's the joy in being wrong?

On the other hand, I guess there is a sense of joy in not having to have to be right all the time, not always to having to keep a clean slate.

I suggest today that Christians, you and I, are those who know the joy, yes joy, of being wrong.

How odd that the world should accuse us of a negative assessment of human nature, of heaping on basically nice people the burden of being sinners. In reality, we are free, joyfully free, to have a negative assessment of human nature because we have such an optimistic assessment of God's nature.

Because it is of God's nature to forgive, we can confess honestly that it is of our nature to sin.

Because God in Christ has set things right between us and God, we can admit that we are wrong.

Today, we are half way through Lent, that Christian season of introspection, honest self-examination, and reflection. Sometimes we Christians don't appreciate how odd it is for us to gather for worship.

And when we do, one of the first things we do on Sundays is to confess our sin to God and to one another. Then we pass the Peace of Christ with each other and sing *"Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end."*

That sort of honest celebration isn't happening everywhere in this town or this country or world. And yet, to be a Christian is to be a people who have had impressed upon us the practice of honesty, confession, repentance.

It is so hard for us to be honest. When confronted with our failures, it's human nature to get defensive.

"I may not be the best person in the world," we say, "but at least I'm not as bad as John Doe over there."

When as a grandfather I stand next to one of my grandchildren and say, "Now Dylan or Peter or Hudson or Elaine, tell me honestly, did you steal those cookies from the cookie jar?" I really shouldn't be too surprised when the child looks up at threatening Grandpa and answers, "No."

There can't be much honesty, very deep confession on the basis of fear.

That's what makes Christian confession different.

We don't so much confess in order to be forgiven; rather, we confess because we are forgiven!

Let me repeat that.

We don't so much confess in order to be forgiven; rather, we confess because we are forgiven!

We are not honest about our sin in order that God **will** love us.

Rather, knowing in Christ that God loves us, we can be honest.

Having experienced the sure, certain, persevering love of God in Jesus Christ, we are able to be honest. We know that nothing, even our sin, can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8).

After all, in just a few weeks, we are going to read the story about how we did our very worst to the Son of God when we hung him on a cross.

Yet, even from the cross he looked down upon us and prayed, "Father, forgive them."

Even more, after his horrible death, when he was raised, he came back to us, **back to us**, the very people who had betrayed him and deserted him and the Gospels tell us he said to his betrayers, "Peace be with you." "Greetings!" He even made a breakfast of fish and bread for them. He broke bread with two in Emmaus.

Therefore we can be honest. Our honesty arises, not out of who we are but out of who God in Christ is. It takes a secure person to be honest and, in Christ, we have seen the amazing security of God's love for us.

There is great freedom in this honesty we call confession.

Not to have to wear the masks, and act with pretense is a great gift.

Not to be forced to lie about our flaws, our shortcomings, our problems. This is great joy.

Furthermore, Christians believe not only that love is the precondition for honesty, but also that honesty is the precondition for change. We are free to change because the first step toward being

new people is to be able to admit to who we are. We are not the people God wants us to be. We are not even the people we want to be. We long to be more, to be better. The first step is admission of who we have failed to be.

So now, on this Third Sunday in Lent, I invite you to a time of silent reflection upon your life, about the promises you have made to God, the ones that you have kept, the promises that you have failed to keep. I ask you to engage in searching examination of your life. Then I will lead you in a Prayer of Confession, for in such honesty is true joy. And, finally, I will, in the name of Christ, pronounce words of forgiveness.