

Confessions

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Good morning my dear brothers and sisters.

This time I'm going to start with a joke, rather than a story:

The joke involves three men present here today; Milton Sanders, of course, ???? and Richard Fuller.

So my brothers were in some sort of an off-road accident and shortly after they were sitting in a beautiful roundish lobby with very comfortable seats and three aisles in front of them, marked with nicely neon light signs with letters A, B and C respectively. But unfortunately there was a huge neon sign that said:

HELL

Automated Reception Area.

So they start to talk among them saying, what's going to happen to us? I told you we should not borrow that Baja1000 vehicle for a spin!...as they were speaking a loud, clear and institutional type voice coming from nowhere says ???? please proceed to Aisle B Suite number 22. So poor ???? stands up says see you later to the still humorous and cool friends and starts walking on aisle B until he reaches the door with the 22 neon sign above it, he opens the door and comes into a square room with no windows, all painted white, the door he just closed disappears behind him and becomes wall. A few moments later the wall in front of him starts coming down, like the power windows in a car. On the other side there is a horrible woman, 3.5 feet high, with an eye hanging out of her face, the other eye looking at him with anger, half of her teeth missing and half way bald. And the institutional voice says ???? , for all the sins you have committed in life you are condemned to live with this woman for the rest of eternity and ???? screams NOOOOOO so loud that 22 doors down the aisle Milton and Richard get terrified, Milton starts crying and Richard trying to remain cool starts sweating cold and trembling until the institutional voice says Milton Sanders, please proceed to Aisle A suite number 37, so he walks on Aisle A and enters the door marked with number 37 in neon light, the door disappears behind him, the wall in front of him starts coming down...on the other side a huge and even uglier woman is standing in her only leg, with a big

baseball bat on her only hand, with an evil look in her only eye and saying you're going to be mine with both of her mouths. And the institutional voice says Milton Sanders, for all the sins you have committed in life you are condemned to live with this woman for the rest of eternity and Milton screams so loud that 37 doors down the aisle Richard completely freaks out and starts trembling until the institutional voice says Richard Fuller, please proceed to Aisle C door 25, so he walks on aisle A, very slowly until he reaches the door marked with number 25 in neon light and gets in, the doors vanishes behind him and the wall in front of him starts coming down...on the other side Megan Fox is standing...and the institutional voice says, Megan Fox, for all the sins you have committed in life you are condemned to live with this man for the rest of eternity...

...and Megan Fox shouted so loud that I heard here on earth and decided to confess my sins, just in case.

And I confessed to God as I often do.

But the idea of confessing to others makes me tremble and sweat cold, like my dear brothers in the roundish lobby. However, a institutional voice that is getting louder each week is telling me I must do it, the corresponding fear has been haunting me all year.

For starters, the first Sunday in 2009, David led us through a 3 step renewal process based on Philipians 3. The last portion was...

Philippians 3:13b-14

...Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,

I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

The first step was: Forgetting the past
We wrote down in little papers our past failures, resentments, anger, disappointment of unmet expectations, guilt and sins and literally left them behind us in a container by that wall.

As a second step we gave thanks for God's everlasting faithfulness, we gave thanks that we can shed the past, including our sins and be

made new to move forward and we gave God thanks and praise for what he has done for us. We wrote it down in another piece of paper and gave it to our Lord by placing it in another container. Finally, we presented our dedication. What we must take up to conform to the image of Christ, like to deepen and strengthen our faith through fellowship, prayer and trusting God, to increase our knowledge of Jesus by studying God's word so that we might be more obedient to God, living a God glorifying life, etc.

All this was a friendly reminder but I was able to mute the voice by writing my confession in a 2009 diary.

Then the second Sunday, Joyce reminded us of the importance of confession,

You've got to be kidding me!

Joyce explained how confessing our mistakes, our failures, our character flaws, or our moral defeat is so hard for us all, about how we try to hide our sins from each other.

Oh, really?

She read the first 5 verses of Psalm 32, in two different versions, The Message one being:

**1 Count yourself lucky, how happy you must be
you get a fresh start, your slate's wiped clean.**

**2 Count yourself lucky— GOD holds nothing against
you
and you're holding nothing back from him.**

**3 When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder,
my words became daylong groans.**

**4 The pressure never let up;
all the juices of my life dried up.**

**5 Then I let it all out;
I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to GOD."**

**Suddenly the pressure was gone
my guilt dissolved,
my sin disappeared.**

So if the only way to relieve ourselves of this burden is to confess it to GOD and only GOD can deliver us from the torment of self-recrimination, why do I have to confess to others? And if the forgiveness we need for our sins comes through GOD's grace. And if we don't deserve forgiveness, but amazingly, GOD takes away the burden of our guilt when we confess to HIM what we have done, why do I have to confess to others?

But shortly after, Joyce shared with us how Augustine wrote Confessions, his autobiography that outlines his sinful youth and his conversion to Christianity. How that changed his life and gave him a freedom in his life and ministry that he had not previously felt.

Now the voice was talking and I was mute but trying not to listen...

And Joyce continued with James 5:17...

James 5:17

**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.
The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.**

She also explained how confessing our sins to each other is a bold step to take. It goes beyond just making things right with God. It challenges us to make things right with the people we're in relationship with

For the first time I saw a significance, but the fear was growing and I was trying to dodge the voice...

Then we prayed as we will in this moment: (please close your eyes)

Most holy and merciful God,
We confess to you and to one another,
that we have sinned against you by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not fully loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We have not always had in us the mind of Christ.
You alone know how often we have grieved you by wasting your
gifts, by wandering from your ways.
Forgive us, most merciful God;
And free us from our sin.
Renew in us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit, for the sake
of Jesus Christ your Son, our Savior.
Amen. *Psalter Hymnal, Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1987*

Then we prayed again as we will in this moment: (Please close your
eyes again)

Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and
too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our
hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a
consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot
change; open to us a future in which we can be changed; and grant
us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image,
through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.

From the PCUSA Book of Common Worship Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993; p. 88

Since we all confessed to each other, It must be over!

Joyce had saved me with this prayers, I thought...but guess what?

Last week, which was the third Sunday of the year, Milton preached
and, guess what was on the first slide?

God is inevitable

Milton explained how we cannot and should not try to go against
God, especially if we are positive of what he wants us to do.
Although Milton was reading from Hebrews 10, Jonas came to my
mind and the Joyce-saved-me theory crumbled down...and the
voice said to me:

Delayed obedience is really disobedience...

So here I am, full of fear, before you and God to confess that
regardless of what is apparent to you:

I am and have been arrogant in not recognizing that I need others to grow, to learn, to receive feedback, to be disciplined and to have accountability.

I confess that I've had cyclic depressions and distress in the past and that, in spite of the many times my God has delivered me from difficult situations, I still get them from time to time and cannot overcome them easily.

I confessed that I had a drinking problem in the past and that God delivered me from it since the turn of the century, but in spite of that and in spite of all what I've learned and even taught, I am stupid enough to fall in it occasionally. Very specifically, on December 30, 2008, I exceeded my limits and allowed my own sons and some non believers to see me drunk in the 75th birthday of one of my father's best friends, instead of giving example.

I confess that I have not been supportive to the needs of the church and of my brothers and sisters in Christ, that I have not been diligent in my duties in the church and that we are frequently paying the rent to Milton, the monies to the convention of Baptist churches and the support to students after the due dates.

I confess that although I love my wife and my kids, I have not fulfilled their needs as a friend and mentor, respectively.

And I confess that I feel a lot of shame but no relief, that at this time my guilt is not dissolved and my sin has not disappeared as Psalm 32 says and I confess that I am doing all this confession reluctantly but in obedience to my God, who is never wrong, or better yet:

God is always right

I apologize to my sons, to my wife, to each one of you and to my God and I ask for your forgiveness, understanding and help.

Perhaps this is about preaching by example, about putting in practice what we have learned so far this year, about a new beginning, about leaving behind the old things, the sins, distress, worries, about giving thanks to God for what we have and for His mercy. And for giving our lives to Christ, for good.

So, as one of you said last week, the one thing ex-president Bush did provide to the world is a bottom to jump from. Similarly we can't go further down today, so let's go up now, we will pray and then continue, please stand up.

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forget our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.
Amen"

Sit down...

**Have you ever thought how God would answer to:
"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name..."?
Something like:
"My son on earth..."**

**My son, who are on earth and feel worried, confused,
disoriented, lonely, sad and distressed,**

**I perfectly know your name and I pronounce it with blessing,
because I love you, which is to say, I accept you as you have
been**

**Together we shall built my Kingdom, of which you are my heir
and in it you will not be alone because I am in you, as you are
in Me.**

I wish that you always do My will, because My will is that you are humanly happy.

You will have your daily bread today, do not worry.

But remember, it is not only yours, I ask you to always share it with others, I give it to you because I know that you know that it is for you and all of your brothers...

I always forgive all of your debts, more even, I exonerate you, for even before you commit them, I know you will commit them, but I also know that some times it is the only way you have to learn, to grow and to identify with Me, which is your vocation...

I only ask that, in the same way, you forgive yourself and you forgive your debtors...

I know you will face temptations and I am sure you will come out on top...

Seize My hand, and hold on to Me, I will give you discernment so you can realize that, since a long time ago, and always, I have given you strength so you can deliver yourself from the evil one...

Never forget that I LOVE YOU from before the beginning of your days, and that I WILL LOVE YOU until after they end, because I AM IN YOU...AS YOU ARE IN ME...

That My blessing be with you from ever and forever and that My eternal peace and love always cover you...

**Only from Me could you obtain them
And only I could give them to you, my son, because...
I AM THE LOVE AND THE PEACE!
AMEN**

In closing, I want to remind you all that:

We are all sinners

Romans 3:23

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God

God loves us

Romans 5:8

**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that
while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

God has a remedy

Romans 6:23

**For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is
eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 10:9

**That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus
and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from
the dead, you will be saved**

John 20:31

**But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is
the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may
have life in his name.**