

Psalm 32:3-5

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 16-C)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 66:18–23; Hebrews 12:4–24; Luke 13:22–30

Cleansed and Forgiven

August 24, 2025

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

There is a story of a young nun who claimed to have had a vision of Jesus. Her bishop decided to test her truthfulness and ordered that the next time she had a vision she should ask Christ what the bishop’s primary sin had been before he became a bishop. Some months later, the nun returned and the bishop asked if she had asked Christ the question, to which she affirmed that she had. “And what did he say?” the bishop asked apprehensively. “Christ said . . .” and the nun paused a moment . . . “He said, ‘I don’t remember.’”

Can you truly wrap your head around that wonderful thought, that you have a God who knows all things and yet He doesn’t remember your sins? Well, you do have such a God! He says: ***“I, I am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and I will not remember your sins.”*** (Isaiah 43:25, ESV) By the grace of God everything—and we mean absolutely everything we’ve done wrong in the past is completely forgiven and forgotten, never to be remembered again. God’s approach to us is very different than that of the wife of a man who made a fool of himself at a party. The next day he felt complete remorse for his actions and begged his wife to forgive him. “I do forgive you,” she promised. But over the next few months, whenever something came up that displeased the wife, she would bring up the party incident. “I thought you forgave me for that,” protested the husband. “Darling, I did forgive you,” she replied. “I just don’t want you to forget that I forgave you.”

Unlike that man, you have a totally fresh start with God. Paul assures us: ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17, ESV) If that is true, who do we still have Confession and Absolution as part of our worship service? We do have the forgiveness that is ours in Christ. Yes, you do have a clean slate today. But we all know what happens. Perhaps you know the Peanuts comic strip character known as Pigpen. He was a boy who couldn’t stay clean and who was always walking around in a cloud of dirt, covered by that dirt. In one comic strip, he is cleaned up and dressed, ready for church. But he walks out the door and within a few steps he starts to get dirty. Frame by frame that dirt increases, so that within a matter of minutes he is back to the old, untidy Pigpen.

That is the reality of our sinful condition. We find ourselves forgiven and free, and yet we often fall back into the same sins again and again. We tell ourselves that we are Christians, and as long as we are trying to be good, that is good enough. Sometimes we turn a blind eye to our own sinfulness, and hope everyone else will forget what we have done. But the reality of our sin catches up with us sooner or later. Suddenly we find ourselves facing the burden our sins—and they don’t necessarily have to be the things that we consider major sins, like murder or abuse or adultery. Sooner or later all sin weighs heavily upon us. We feel the burden of our actions. We call that burden guilt, and guilt can have a dramatic impact on our hearts and lives.

David, who wrote the words of our text, understood that very well. This particular psalm may flow out of his sin with Bathsheba. His adultery, his lying and his murder of Bathsheba’s husband Uriah, did catch up with him. He says that hiding sin in his heart was such a burden that it felt as if his bones were wasting away. His strength withered away, as the guilt and shame of his sin penetrated to the very core of his being. His burden felt so heavy that he groaned under it all day long. Thankfully, David also recognized that there is hope for the burdened heart. The means of relieving the heart burdened by sin is sincere confession. As David says: ***I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.***

We can look at the things David did and try to assure ourselves that we haven’t done any of those things. So often that is the response of people to the commandments of God. I haven’t killed anyone. I haven’t cheated on my spouse. I haven’t stolen anything. We can look to the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus would show us that what we *think* and what we actually

do are very different. Our epistle lesson today starts by speaking of the **“struggle against sin”** (Hebrews 12:4, ESV) In the verses before our epistle, the Spirit inspired the writer of Hebrews to warn us against **“every weight, and sin which clings so closely”** (Hebrews 12:1, ESV) Try as hard as we want, we find sin dragging us down again, weighing heavily upon us, interfering with our relationships with one another and our relationship with God.

This is why there is so much joy in knowing how God works to cleanse and forgive us. Sin thrives in concealment. It fears exposure. Sin seeks to make us indifferent to its presence, but it also eats away at us. Hidden sin is a burden. Unresolved guilt—or more precisely, unconfessed sin—affects our entire being. That is what David was talking about when he said: ***When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*** The wonderful power of confession is that it breaks through this concealment as sin is revealed to another. Confession not only talks about sin but actually admits it, acknowledges it as we did in our worship today. Even if we use different words we are still saying the same thing: **Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name.** Our confession in worship is important. We need to confess that we are sinners in need of God’s grace. It prepares us to hear and receive the promise of forgiveness through the loving Saviour.

And what happens when we truly, sincerely confess our sins with a repentant heart? David knew. ***I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*** What joy we have in that forgiveness! Confession lets God bring to our hearts and lives the freedom, the release, and the peace of forgiveness. Confession brings us face to face with our sin—but it also brings us face to face with our Saviour. David confessed his sins to the prophet Nathan and heard from the prophet the assurance of God’s forgiveness—a forgiveness that would be for all people through the Saviour who takes away the power of sin and death and hell. In His great love for us, the eternal Son take on our flesh and lives among us. The day came when, on a hill called Golgotha, the Lord of Life gave His life as the perfect sacrifice for all sin and for all sinners. As Paul said: ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) His perfect Sacrifice brings us the forgiveness of all our sins, no matter how great, no matter how small. He died for us, but He also lives to declare to us His wonderful promise of forgiveness as we confess our sins.

Have you ever said, something like, “Boy, it feels good to get that off my chest”? Something that has been nagging at us has finally come out and when it does, it feels so good! A small pebble in our shoe can cause great discomfort as we walk but once that pebble is gone, we feel better. How much greater is our relief when the sins that torment us are taken away! And how we long for that relief! In Spain, a father and his teenage son were at odds with each other. The relationship became so strained that the son ran away from home. His father, though, began a cross-country journey in search of his rebellious son. Finally, in Madrid, in a last, desperate attempt to find him, his father put an ad in the newspaper. “Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you . . . Your father.”

The next day at noon in front of the newspaper office 800 Pacos showed up. They were all seeking forgiveness and love from their fathers.

Is your name Paco? So often you and I run away from God’s love. We choose to live our own way. Yet our rebellion does not stop our Father, because it is His nature to seek and to save lost people. Jesus says to us, “Dear Paco, meet Me in My Word. I know your struggles. I know your very heart. But I suffered for you. I took your sin upon Myself. I forgive you. You are cleansed and forgiven. I love you. Walk with Me in that love and in the life I won for you through My death and resurrection.

We have often heard the words of the apostle John: ***If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*** (1 John 1:8-2:2 - ESV) How blessed we are to have such a loving Saviour! He does not look at what we have done, or what we can do. He comes to

bring healing to those who confess their sins. We confess as we talk to God in prayer. We confess our sins as we worship. We can confess to the pastor. As we confess, we will learn what David knew: confession is good for the soul. ***I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD”***— and thanks be to God! He forgives us for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.