

CONFESSION BEING MINDFUL OF GOD'S MERCY

We make our beginning in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
Dear Lord God, Sanctify us in Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

In our hymnal, Lutheran Service Book, there are five settings or liturgies for our worship services. Each of them begins with Confession and Absolution. We begin this way because God says in **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* In this Bible study, we will look at God's mercy which brings to mind our sinfulness and our need for confession of sin which is the 'C' in the **ACTS** of prayer. Because we begin our worship services with confession, many people prefer to also begin their prayers with confession. If we begin our prayers with confession, and make use of the acronym **CATS**, our confession would be followed by **A**doration, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. Either way is good.

To be mindful of God's mercy, we must be mindful of the greatness of His holiness. We must also be mindful of how very great our sin is and how severe the consequences of sin are. One of Isaiah's favorite names for God (used 25 times) is 'the Holy One of Israel'. God is absolutely holy, pure and sinless. In **Isaiah 6:3**, Isaiah saw a vision of the Lord in the temple and he heard the angels call out: *"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."* In the Hebrew language, repetition expresses a superlative, so by repeating 'holy' three times - 'holy, holy, holy' - it emphasizes that God is supremely holy. The threefold repetition of 'holy' is also related to the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God's absolute holiness and righteousness cannot tolerate the slightest sin. Sin is not a trivial matter. Every breaking of God's will, including unknown sin, has deadly consequences. As it says in **Romans 6:23**, *The wages of sin is death.* This means the wages of one sin is death; the wages of every sin is death. Because sin cannot be tolerated in the presence of God's holiness, we, as sinners, cannot live in the presence of God's holiness. Because God is holy, sin separates us from His presence.

Let's look at the first sin in the Bible to see how it separated Adam and Eve from the presence of God. **Genesis 2:15-17** *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."* Let's also look at **Genesis 3:1-8** *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.*

How did the one sin of Adam and Eve separate them from God's presence? (Hid from Him, self-conscious, couldn't face Him, fellowship was broken) They had eaten from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and, according to the name of the tree, now they knew they had done wrong. They had not only gained knowledge of evil, they had also experienced evil.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them only one commandment. They could eat anything in the whole entire expanse of the Garden of Eden, with one exception - they were not to eat from just one tree. There was an abundance of every kind of fruit tree, so how hard could it be to just leave one fruit tree alone?? God desired that Adam and Eve give Him their full love and devotion, their total obedience to His will. God had given Adam just one commandment, along with a sentence of death, if he disobeyed, because sin cannot stand in the presence of God's holiness. Satan presented to Eve doubt and denial of God's Word. He also presented the opportunity to become like god with new wisdom. Adam and Eve had to choose who they would listen to - the voice of God, who had given them life; or the voice of Satan, the deceiver. Adam and Eve chose to listen to the wrong voice. Rather than listen to the truth of God, both Adam and Eve chose to listen to the lies of Satan. This sin caused an immediate separation between God and Adam and Eve. We see the severe consequences of that sin because it caused the death of an innocent to cover the sin of the guilty. An animal died to provide coverings for Adam and Eve. From the very beginning, we see that death is a direct result of sin.

Later in Exodus, God gave His people Ten Commandments which they were instructed to obey, for their "own good". (**Deut 10:13**) God gave these commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Let's look at **Exodus 19:12** *Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.* God was present on Mount Sinai. His presence made the entire mountain holy ground. Moses was allowed to go up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments, but the people, because of their natural sinfulness, were not allowed to even come near the mountain. This is a picture of the separation that sin creates between God and all people. God cannot be approached by sinful mankind. It also shows that the holiness of God cannot tolerate the presence of sin. You could say that God has 'zero tolerance' for sin.

Let's look at **Exodus 25:10-15** *Have them make a chest of acacia wood – two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. 11 Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold moulding around it. 12 Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. 13 Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 14 Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it. 15 The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed.*

These were God's instructions for making and transporting the Ark of the Covenant. Keep this in mind as we look at **2 Samuel 6:2-7** *He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark. 3 They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart 4 with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. 5 David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals. 6 When they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. 7 The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.*

- > What was so very special about the Ark? **2 Samuel 6:2** God's presence between cherubim
- > What were God's instructions to transport the Ark? **Exodus 25:14** must carry it with poles
- > How did King David transport the Ark? **2 Samuel 6:3 & 6:6** On a new cart, pulled by oxen
- > Why did God strike down Uzzah? **V 6** Sinful man had touched the very presence of God.

God had been present on Mount Sinai but the people were forbidden to come near the mountain. The Ark of the Covenant was also a place of God's presence. The Ark had been kept in the Holy of Holies, in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. No one except the High Priest was allowed access into the Holy of Holies and then only once a year on the Day of Atonement, and only after the High Priest had been cleansed by bringing a sacrifice for himself. This is a picture of the total separation between the holiness of God and the sinfulness of mankind. Uzzah, a sinful man, had touched the very presence of God in an unauthorized manner, contrary to God's prescribed instructions. This episode also shows that the holiness of God is unapproachable by sinners. Our holy God cannot tolerate the presence of sin. There is no compromise regarding God's holiness and what He has commanded. This is another picture of God's 'zero tolerance' for sin.

Leviticus 10:1-2 *Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.*

Aaron was the High Priest and served God in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Nadab and Abihu were Aaron's sons so they were also priests, but they chose, on their own, to offer incense to the Lord. God had given strict procedures for the performance of all priestly duties in the Tabernacle. Aaron's sons did something that had not been authorized by God. Again, the holiness of God was not to be trifled with. Their disobedience - their sin - was punished by death.

Let's look at **Joshua 6:16-21** *The seventh time around, when the priests sounded the trumpet blast, Joshua commanded the people, "Shout! For the LORD has given you the city! 17 The city & all that is in it are to be devoted to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. 18 But keep away from the devoted things, so that you will not bring about your own destruction by taking any of them. Otherwise you will make the camp of Israel liable to destruction and bring trouble on it. 19 All the silver and gold and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the LORD and must go into his treasury." 20 When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city. 21 They devoted the city to the LORD and destroyed with the sword every living thing in it – men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep and donkeys.*

In verse 17, 'devoted to the Lord' means set apart as an offering to the Lord for destruction (the people were condemned for their sin, their possessions were also condemned). The soldiers of Israel were the agents of God's righteous judgment on the evil in Jericho and Canaan. God was not wiping out the land of Canaan just so His people could have their land. He was executing judgment against their evil and keeping the nation of Israel separate from their sinful neighbors. In **Genesis 15:16**, God said, "*In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.*" The Israelites were in Egypt 400 years, waiting for the evil in the land of Canaan to be fully evil enough to deserve God's full judgment and destruction. God's judgment against Jericho and the land of Canaan was just like God's judgment and total destruction of everything in the Flood, and it was just like His judgment and total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and everything in it. Those acts of severe judgment were taken against the great evil that had filled the earth and that had filled Sodom and Gomorrah. Just so, this act of God's judgment against Jericho was carried out because of the great evil in that city and in that land.

These next two verses show that God is not just full of vengeance, He is also full of mercy.

Ezekiel 33:11 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live; **2 Peter 3:9** He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Let's look at the rest of the story in **Joshua 7**: (This is a long chapter so it has been condensed.) (Listen for the sin, listen for God's anger against that sin, listen for the consequences of that sin.) *But the Israelites acted unfaithfully in regard to the devoted things; Achan, of the tribe of Judah, took some of them. So the LORD's anger burned against Israel. Now Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai to spy out the region. So the men went up and spied out Ai. When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Not all the people will have to go up against Ai. Send 3000 men to take it and do not weary all the people, for only a few men are there." So about 3000 men went up; but they were routed by the men of Ai, who killed about 36 of them. At this the hearts of the people melted and became like water. Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The LORD said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions. That is why the Israelites cannot stand against their enemies; they turn their backs and run because they have been made liable to destruction. I will not be with you any more unless you destroy whatever among you is devoted to destruction." "Go, consecrate the people, for this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: That which is devoted (set apart for destruction) is among you, O Israel. You cannot stand against your enemies until you remove it. He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him. He has violated the covenant of the LORD and has done a disgraceful thing in Israel!" Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Achan of the tribe of Judah, was taken. Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me." Achan replied, "It is true! I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I have done: When I saw in the plunder (in Jericho) a beautiful robe from Babylonia, 200 shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing 50 shekels, I coveted them and took them. They are hidden in the ground inside my tent." So Joshua sent messengers and they ran to the tent and there it was, hidden in his tent. They took the things from the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites and spread them out before the LORD. Then Joshua, together with all Israel, took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the robe, the gold wedge, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys and sheep, his tent and all that he had, to the Valley of Achor. Joshua said, "Why have you brought this trouble on us? The LORD will bring trouble on you today." Then all Israel stoned him, and after they had stoned the rest, they burned them. Then the LORD turned from his fierce anger. He said to Joshua, "Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Take the whole army with you and go up and attack Ai. For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land.*

- > How is God's anger described? **Joshua 7:1** the Lord's anger burned, **v 26** His fierce anger
- > How did God describe their sin? **v 1** acted unfaithfully **v 15** violated the covenant of the Lord and did a disgraceful thing
- > What was the result of Achan's sin? **v 12** the nation could not stand against their enemies; they turned their backs and ran (defeated) because they had been made liable to destruction. God was no longer with them. The nation lost God's support and presence – He was no longer fighting for them; they were on their own and without Him, they lost.
- > How did God promise to punish their disobedience? **v 15** He who is caught with the devoted things shall be destroyed by fire, along with all that belongs to him.

> When Achan's sin was punished, what did God do? **v 26** He turned from His fierce anger and delivered Ai into their hands. **Joshua 8:1** *For I have delivered into your hands the king of Ai.*

Jericho was the first city in the land of Canaan to be taken by Israel. God gave precise instructions regarding the capture and destruction of Jericho. Hundreds of years before this, God had promised the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He promised to deliver Canaan into the hands of the Israelites if they would be faithful to Him and wholeheartedly obey Him. The disobedience of one man brought death and defeat to the whole nation, just as the sin of one man (Adam) brought death to all mankind. This episode demonstrates God's wrath against sin and His severe judgment of sin. Achan's disobedience against God's will brought God's fierce anger upon Achan, his family and the whole nation of Israel.

Now it's time to look at God's mercy.

We just looked at God's punishment of evil in the land of Canaan. Many years later, in the southern kingdom of Judah, there was a king named Manasseh. **2 Chronicles 33:9-13** *But Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites. 10 The LORD spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. 11 So the LORD brought against them the army commanders of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh prisoner, put a hook in his nose, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. 12 In his distress he sought the favour of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 And when he prayed to him, the LORD was moved by his entreaty and listened to his plea; so he brought him back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD is God.*

- > How bad was King Manasseh? **v 9** >How did God punish this evil? **v 11**
- > What happened to the king's heart? **v 12-13**
- > How did God respond to his change of heart? **v 13**
- > How did Manasseh respond to God's mercy? **v 13b** He knew that the Lord is God.

Last month, we looked at God's blessings and saw how guilt, if it brings repentance and confession before God, and God then grants forgiveness and renewal, that guilt is actually a blessing. In the same way, Manasseh's captivity by the Assyrians brought about his return to God. Because God restored him, that great trouble and punishment became a blessing to him.

Let's look at Luke 7:36-50. *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and took his place at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." 41 "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with*

ointment. ⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven - for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little. ⁴⁸ and he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." ⁴⁹ Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" ⁵⁰ and he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

V 37, "a woman of the city, who was a sinner". This woman could have been a prostitute or an adulteress. **V 38**, In later Judaism, a married woman who let her hair down in public could be divorced. She exhibited scandalous behavior by wiping Jesus' feet with her hair. But Jesus interpreted her action as reverent and appropriate because her tears were born of sorrow over sin and spoke clearly of her confession and repentance. **V 39**, regarding the significance of the Pharisee's thoughts: If a ceremonially impure person such as this woman touched an observant Jew, they would be rendered unclean and therefore unable to enter the temple area. **V 41**, An ordinary worker earned about one denarius per day; these sums were substantial. **V 42**, Amazingly, the debt was forgiven. Obviously, it was an unusual event, which makes a powerful point in Jesus' story. The greater the gift, the greater the gratitude. The point is easy to understand when it relates to money. The money angle of the story helps clarify Jesus' point that a 'great sinner' would love God more than someone who did not need forgiveness, such as the self-righteous Pharisee. Jesus teaches that even notorious sinners can be forgiven and restored. This woman's sins were now forgiven, her sorrow was erased, and her burden of guilt was lifted. She now knew God's mercy!! This woman's love did not earn her forgiveness. Her love flowed from having been shown mercy. Forgiveness imparts deliverance from sin and death. Then the peace of God naturally flows from having received God's forgiveness and acceptance. Comparing this woman to the Pharisee, God forgives sinners, not those who consider themselves to be righteous.

Can you be a 'really bad' sinner and still be saved?? Is there a requirement for God's mercy? Look at **Joshua 2:8-14** for a picture of God's mercy. *Before the spies lay down for the night, she (Rahab) went up on the roof ⁹ and said to them, "I know that the LORD has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. ¹⁰ We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. ¹¹ When we heard of it, our hearts sank and everyone's courage failed because of you, for the LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. ¹² Now then, please swear to me by the LORD that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a sure sign ¹³ that you will spare the lives of my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and that you will save us from death." ¹⁴ "Our lives for your lives!" the men assured her. "If you don't tell what we are doing, we will treat you kindly and faithfully when the LORD gives us the land."*

Rahab is another example of a 'really bad sinner' who received God's mercy. > Was Rahab saved because she hid the spies or was there something more? **V 9 & 11** She was saved because of her actions, but her actions were based on knowledge, belief and faith in God. She was saved by the grace and mercy of God because of her faith in the one true God. Rahab is another picture which shows that God's mercy is freely given to those who have faith in Him.

God's mercy to Rahab was also shown by her inclusion in the lineage of Christ. **Matthew 1:5** *Rahab was the mother of Boaz, Boaz and Ruth were the parents of Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, Jesse was the father of King David. Jesus was in the line and house of David.*

There's MORE MERCY to be found in the Parable of the Wedding Garment.

Let's look at **Matthew 22:1-14** *Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: 2 "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. 3 He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. 4 "Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' 5 "But they paid no attention and went off - one to his field, another to his business. 6 The rest seized his servants, ill-treated them and killed them. 7 The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. 8 Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. 9 Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' 10 So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. 11 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen."*

This parable shows God's judgment. It is also a picture of His mercy. This parable is explained in the footnotes of The Lutheran Study Bible. The father represents God, the bridegroom represents Jesus. Those who were originally invited represent the people of Israel who refused to come to the banquet which had been prepared for them by God the Father to honor His son, Jesus. Some of those who were invited to the feast also ignored the 2nd invitation. Others greeted these messengers with violence. These refusals represent Israel's reaction to the prophets whom God sent to them. Their continued refusal to accept the invitation disqualified them from attending the banquet. The final invitation was issued to 'all the people they could find' and represents the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's Kingdom. The wedding hall represents the church here on earth. Regarding the wedding garment – Israelites expected their invited guests to wear festive wedding garments which the host could provide. So this person's failure to dress in appropriate clothing, which would have been freely given to him, offended the host. This wedding garment signifies the righteousness of God which covers our sin. It is freely given to all those who will receive it. We understand garments and clothing, and what looks good on us. There is no more beautiful garment, nothing looks better on us, than the garment of righteousness that is freely given to us because of the perfect obedience of Christ. This garment of righteousness covers our sinfulness and makes us beautiful and acceptable in God's sight. In His mercy, God no longer sees our sin – He sees the righteousness of His beloved Son.

God earnestly invites everyone to His eternal kingdom. He is not willing that any should perish. Because of His great and bountiful mercy, a garment of righteousness is freely and graciously given to all who will wear it. As God says in **1 John 1:9** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

CLOSING PRAYER:

Almighty and merciful God, We praise You for Your glory, we give thanks to You for Your great mercy. We have seen from Your Holy Word that we have indeed sinned much. We do not deserve to come into your presence. We deserve nothing but your eternal punishment. But with You there is forgiveness of sin. With all our heart, we are sorry for our sins and we sincerely repent of them. We take refuge in Your infinite mercy. For the sake of your dear Son, Jesus, we ask you to have mercy on us. Forgive our sin, renew us and lead us by Your Holy Spirit, so that our hearts will be filled with gratitude and love for You, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.