

We bow our hearts in prayer: God, Be merciful to me, a sinner. Amen.

Dear little children of our heavenly Father,

The primary reason God's children come to the Divine Service is to receive Absolution.

Absolution is the putting away of your sins. It is the declaration that God has forgiven you.

This absolution comes in many forms. From the direct declaration of it in the Absolution, to the pronouncement of it in the sermon, to the distribution of it in the Lord's Supper.

This past week, at Family Bible School we learned about how the Lord Redeemed His People as we studied the first 15 chapters of Exodus.

We learned how the Lord prepared His people to leave Egypt, the land of their slavery, through the many troubles that Pharaoh brought upon them.

We learned how the Lord sent His servant Moses to lead them out of their slavery.

And how the Lord fought for the Israelites by His mighty power using the 10 plagues, and how He redeemed them from death, by the spilling of the blood of an innocent Passover lamb; and how He freed them not only from slavery, but also from fear of Pharaoh's tyranny, as He drowned Egypt's army in the sea after Israel safely walked through it.

In numerous ways, the Divine Service is a weekly Exodus for us, a leaving behind of sin, guilt, death, and the tyranny of the devil.

Our text for meditation...

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

This is the message we have heard from Him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 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.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Darkness is a terrible thing.

The ninth plague brought upon Egypt was one of a thick darkness that could be felt.

In darkness, you don't know where you are going. You don't know where you are.

You don't know what kind of danger you may, or may not be in.

But when darkness is all you have ever known, you can get pretty comfortable in it.

God describes our natural spiritual condition as darkness, lost in sin.

The Pharisee in today's Gospel was a liar, walking in darkness, while claiming fellowship with God.

He went to the temple, not for forgiveness but to boast in His accomplishments.

"God, I thank you that I am not like other men..."

"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."

We are told that Jesus told this parable to **those who trusted in themselves**

that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt.

The Pharisee's attendance at the temple that day, Jesus said, was of no help to him. He did not go home justified, or right before God. He was deceiving himself. While he lived an outwardly moral life and appeared very pious and godly, yet, he had no fellowship with God, nor did he truly want fellowship with God's children, having contempt for them.

It is sad too, because he was in the very place that was completely dedicated to dispensing God's forgiveness.

He saw the priests sacrificing the burnt offerings, and the sin offerings.

He saw the innocent sheep and the bulls sacrificed by God through His priests to put away the sin of those who brought them.

He heard the Scriptures read and sung,

proclaiming the darkness of his sinful nature and the light of God's merciful forgiveness.

He heard the priest blessing God's people with His gracious presence as they departed into the world again.

He was surrounded with the sights, sounds, and smells of the seriousness of sin and its consequences as he saw and heard the animals slaughtered.

But these were also the sights, sounds, and smells of God's forgiveness, which in the Pharisee's self-righteousness, he neglected and wasted.

Fellow children, **Do not be deceived: God is not mocked.**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we believe that that we can attain righteousness by ourselves, we are **not practicing the truth**, no matter how morally or ethically we live, or pious we appear.

If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.

If we believe that we are not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, sex-offenders, Pharisees, gang members, shady businessmen, unscrupulous officials, etc. then we are deceiving ourselves.

Because the same sin that lives in them, also lives in you and me.

The same defiance, the same pride, the same lusts, the same hatred, the same greed & contempt...

These are all already present in your flesh.

In the Catechism Responsory, we considered our own situation in life in family, work, and so on as to what sins we should confess: whether you have been disobedient, dishonest, lazy; whether you have injured anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted anything or done any harm.

In that list, there are 3 that really stick out for me: Being lazy, neglecting and wasting anything.

I suppose the reason why they stick out for me is because there isn't always a firm line that you cross to know you are committing them.

For example: when does focused work in one area of life, become negligence in other areas?

When does rest (a needed blessing from God) turn into laziness?

Laziness, neglect and waste are just as wrong as stealing, murder, and lying in God's eyes, as are covetousness, hatred, and lust.

This is the darkness that you were born into and naturally blinds you to God's light.

It is the same darkness that believes that certain public sins are much worse than the private sins that we are able to hide from others.

But this is what the Divine Service is for. This is why you go to church.

You come so that your eyes may be opened to see your darkness, and the corruption in your body.

You come so that you are not deceived, and so that you do not deceive yourself.

Like Israel in Egypt, the previous comfort of our slavery in sin,

becomes unbearable and causes us to cry out.

When you come to the Divine Service, you know that you will have the opportunity to confess your sins.

It is the same cry as the tax collector, "**God, be merciful to me, a sinner.**"

But even more directly translated, in that prayer he is saying, "atone for me."

And like for Israel in Egypt, God has sent His servant, not a new Moses to give you more laws, but **Jesus Christ the righteous**, the One who has perfectly fulfilled Moses' laws.

During Jesus' earthly life, He powerfully fought for you against the devil's temptations and the allurements of the world.

He knew when rest would become laziness,

and when busy-ness at work would mean neglect in other areas.

He had compassion for sinners, not contempt, and so called them out of their darkness, desiring to have fellowship with them and unite Himself to them.

He's the one you pray for when you pray, "**God, be merciful to me, a sinner,**" "atone for me," because Jesus is the **propitiation for your sins**. He is the payment for your sins, as our texts says, **the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin**.

It's by His sacrificial death, that your coveting, greed, lust, and contempt are put away from you.

It is by His innocent life, that the Father no longer sees your extortion, adultery, lies, laziness, neglect, or waste, but instead sees Christ's perfect obedience, fear, love, truth and diligence.

What does this mean? What's this mean for you? It means what you will sing in just a few moments, "*Where the pascal blood is poured, death's dread angel sheaths his sword.*" (ELH #310:3)

You need not fear physical or earthly death, for the Lord's judgement has passed over you.

Christ, as our Passover **Lamb who takes away the sin of the world**,

has *washed you in the tide flowing from His pierced side*, through Baptism

and thus frees you from the tyranny of guilt and Satan's power.

And if all this wasn't enough, He *gives His sacred blood for wine* and *His body for the feast*

at His altar, there to have fellowship with you and give you fellowship with His children.

You come to the Divine Service to be in God's light and have fellowship with Him;

to be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of forgiveness;

to see that the Father **is faithful and just to forgive you your sins**

and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

You come so that you may go down to your house justified in Christ.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,

as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria