

3.27.22 –Lent 4

“A New Creation”

Subtitle: “Confession & Reassurance”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 32 (NKJV) ~ Pam

The Joy of Forgiveness - A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.

¹ Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered.

² Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ When I kept silent, my bones grew old
Through my groaning all the day long.

⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;
My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. *Selah*

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You,
And my iniquity I have not hidden.
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”
And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You
In a time when You may be found;
Surely in a flood of great waters
They shall not come near him.

⁷ You are my hiding place;
You shall preserve me from trouble;
You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will guide you with My eye.

⁹ Do not be like the horse or like the mule,
Which have no understanding,
Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle,
Else they will not come near you.

¹⁰ Many sorrows shall be to the wicked;
But he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.

¹¹ Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous;
And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

L: These are Reassuring Words from God! C: Thanks be to God.

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (HCSB) ~ Pam

The Ministry of Reconciliation

¹⁶ From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him in this way. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ¹⁸ Everything **is** from God, who

reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." ²¹ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

L: These are Reconciling Words of God! C: Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, our Savior, thank you for the freedom to worship you. We are grateful for the fellowship of gathering together to **be** the body of Christ. Help us to feel your presence and forgiveness as we confess our shortcomings to you. Reconcile us to yourself as we receive your love and hear your voice in the words spoken. Let us wrestle with these words of both comfort and challenge as we prepare ourselves this Lent for the journey to the cross and the tomb. Lord, speak now through your messenger. "**Amen.**"

We are back to winter! I may have jinxed it by wishing us all a Happy Spring last week! I do not have that power; it is God's creation that determines our weather. The switch does prompt me to remind you to wear layers, bring scarves or sweaters for the next few weeks of unpredictable temperatures before we switch over to Air Conditioning.

Friday night, we had hot *and* cool jazz in the Fellowship Hall as New Beginnings hosted Phaze II Jazz Band to a "full house." A well-known local band, they toured around the world, and last month played at Blues Alley! Thank you to Debbie, Elmer, and Fran who joined me at what felt like an alcohol-free "club!" God was in the house in a different expression! A fundraiser for them, they invited non-church people (friends of friends) into a friendly space—the start of post-pandemic outreach. First Baptist used to do that with local rock bands up in the gym years ago, I understand.

As we begin our journey toward Easter, the next few weeks will focus on preparation; but please keep listening for the work God is

revealing to us. And keep practicing your prayer tools: silence, breath, walking, and Scripture reading prayers. Psalm 32, one of the penitential psalms, written by David, is also one of thanksgiving. The writer is grateful for God's forgiveness and explains how confession transforms an individual like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar to butterfly. His silence of not confessing brought illness, the poet claims, but more likely it was the weight and ailments of a guilty conscience. He felt a heavy burden calling him to confess his sin to God. With confession comes promised instruction and insight, from his own testimony and from God. He warns the reader not to be stubborn like a horse or a mule! Can anyone of you relate to that? To experience the true freedom that comes from forgiveness, God demands total honesty.

This was a favorite psalm of Augustine, Martin Luther, and Isaak Walton. Although Christ is not mentioned, His sacrificial work of the cross is implied. The freedom from that guilt and our hope for forgiveness comes at resurrection. We must do the work, however, and confess our sins, both committed and omitted actions. Confession is another form of prayer and can be done silently or in a prayer journal but must be done. Lent and Easter are good times to start this new rhythm. Families may use Christmas or Easter as a spiritual re-set button, although the youngest generations may not have that tradition, so it is up to us to pray for those drifted away from the church and to invite them to come back. This may be your easiest invitation timeframe--Palm Sunday and Easter. God may be working on guilty consciences using His heavy hands, pressing them toward transformation in Christ.

In our second passage, Paul was concerned about the church at Corinth. They were becoming superficial and humanistic through false teachers. He sent Timothy and this letter to sternly address these issues. Paul had met the risen Christ and had learned much about Jesus from Peter and John. They must have shared stories of Christ's miracles, but also of Jesus' normal life on the road with them--his humanity. It is this human nature with which Paul both connects and warns. We too must see Christ and each other from both human and divine perspectives. Because of God's love and our free will to choose good or evil, we are created human beings with flaws. Otherwise, confession would not be necessary, right?! We are still children of God (that is our divine nature--love), despite any wrongdoing. And because of Christ, we are transformed into **new** creations. As we encounter each other and especially new folks, we must endeavor to see below the surface humanity, to see the divine butterfly, not the caterpillar.

This Godly view, which can be difficult sometimes, needs to be affirmed and encouraged; the weight of sin is heavy. Like a child needs reassurance when learning to walk, believers, both new and mature, need affirmation of their existence as a child of God, of the reality of God's forgiveness, that they do have spiritual gifts, and that a sure place in the Kingdom of God is available to them. This message is counter-cultural: sin, fear, envy, lust, greed all creep in and destroy. But for Christ! In Christ, all things are made new. "A Christian can convince people of what God can do ONLY if God has already done it for him or her (Barclay)." We can be channels of reconciliation if we demonstrate God's reconciling love.

I was watching a rerun of the 1993 movie Groundhog Day last evening. It occurred to me that the main character Phil Connors (played by Bill Murray) was a horrible person: greedy, lustful, angry, and hurtful at the beginning of the film. His day in Punxsutawney, PA repeats endlessly as he commits every crime or sin he can imagine. Nothing changed, no consequences. Only when he opens up to love and kindness does he want to improve himself and do things to help people (saves a kid from falling out of the tree, changes a tire for three grateful senior ladies, learns to play the piano). Phil's future is slowly changed as he transforms. This is not a Christian movie, but it has the theme we are studying today. By confessing our sinfulness, we are reconciled to God through Christ. We are transformed from the ugly to the beautiful; we can now love and be loved. Scripture has examples of second and third chances for redemption: Moses, Noah, Jonah, Rahab, David, Peter, and Paul to name only a few. We are called to be the ambassadors of Christ, as our Biblical heroes are ambassadors for us. Your life testimony through legacy can bring others to Christ. We only do the introductions; He does the transforming!

The cross and the empty tomb enable this reconciliation between our flawed humanity and God's forgiving divinity. So, as we have been preparing ourselves during Lent for the journey to Easter morning, let us continue to confess our sins, use our prayer tools to draw nearer to God (James 4:8), to trust God's gracious and merciful spirit, and to await and welcome the new creation He transforms us to be. Amen. //

Will you pray with me? Dear Lord, although confession is difficult, a guilty conscience is burdensome, so we ask you to help us be honest with

you and confess. We know you see us and what we do or don't do; please forgive us. Help us to feel affirmed as your children and give us strength and awareness to encourage others in their faith. We thank you for your Son, who is still teaching us and living within us today. Help us demonstrate our love and the beauty of transformation through Christ to others who desperately need you. **Amen.**