

True Confessions

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They say confession is good for the soul. According to Canon Law, the bare minimum is once a year if you are catholic. And what about the other parts of the church? What about you and me? I think confession is a lost art. You know, confession is all throughout the bible. Erin read you Psalm 32 - "*When I kept it all inside, it turned my bones to dust*" Quite descriptive when we have something we need to confess but don't. And in Proverbs 28:13, "*You can't whitewash your sins and get away with it. You find mercy by admitting them and leaving them.*" In Matthew, it tells us how to confront a brother or sister in times of strife gently. And before taking communion, we are to examine ourselves and confess our sins deeply. Listen to part of a Brethren Confession that has been prepared for ministers in the denomination:

*My life has times when I am lonely and lost -
Times when I wonder if others care.
I need to be able to admit those feelings and face my own lack of response to others.
My life has times of choosing the wrong,
Not just by ignorance or accident,
But also by rationalization,
By stubborn intent.
I need to be able to "come to my senses"
And return and be forgiven and welcomed.*

When we confess, we allow the power of God to provide insight and refreshment, and renewal.

In the olden days in the Church of the Brethren, before Love Feast, the deacons would visit each household to make sure all things were right between the members. They would encourage confession and forgiveness. Tom Hostetler remembers the deacons coming to his house, and one of the three questions was, "Are you still in love with the Brethren, especially those of the household faith? (meaning your own church) If you could not say yes, Love Feast would not happen until it was made right.

The Brethren have a tag-line: Peacefully, Simply, Together.

Together.

We are community. Community doesn't mean we just show up en mass and happen to be community; it means we live together, love together, argue together, aggravate each other, offend each other. That is what true community is. This is not some fairy tale, lovey-dovey idea- community means we work it out together.

I took some extensive training through the Landmark Forum, and there I learned how to confess and the absolute freedom that comes from that! Miracles happen when I confess! So, here's how I was taught how to confess:

Let's say I'm talking to my husband, Dennis (and when you are married, you have a lot to confess!) I say, "Dennis, you know I've wanted to talk to you about something. I've been a jerk, and I need to tell you how." And then I go on to explain how I've been a jerk. I learned this outside the church. But I don't hear much of it *in* the church or *anywhere* in the world. It is a lost art and oh so powerful! I encourage you to start confessing where you've been a jerk, or a meanie, or a gossip or whatever the word is for you.

Things turn around really fast when I get down off my high horse. Because you know, I have an aversion to being wrong, and when I humble myself, God can be there.

Another place confession is taught, is in the 12-step program, which heals and brings wholeness to those who have admitted their brokenness. In Step 4 of Celebrate Recovery, a religious AA Meeting, says, I am to openly examine and confess my sins. I am to look deeply into another's experience to consider how what I've done might have caused pain. And in Step 5, I am to admit to God, myself *and another human being* the exact nature of my wrongs. If I don't confess, this is a barrier to grace, forgiveness, and healing, and I might say - to the true life, the life of freedom Jesus promises us!

Another poetic way to hear this is in these wise words from the Sage of Herat:

*Would you become a pilgrim of Love?
The first condition is that you make yourself
Humble as dust and ashes.*

I want to be a pilgrim of love. One way I'm doing that is to break down the strong inclination I have to be right. I need to be as humble as dust and ashes. It has been a long journey, but I see how strong *and* soft I become when I take this path of vulnerability. When I confess, I have nothing to hide. I bare my soul and stand strong in the love of God. This way of being is like crawling on the skinny branches of life. It's risky, and yet it is real!

I have been confessing to individuals in my life, but during this time of national upheaval, I have been looking at how to confess to a larger issue. Only when we confess do we open the river of love and forgiveness from God. Oh Lord, we need a lot of that now!

As a child, I naively thought that racism was a thing of the past. Those of us who are white have a very hard time seeing that we constantly receive special treatment. This privilege makes it harder for us to recognize the experiences of

people of color as valid and real when they speak of racial profiling, police brutality, discrimination in the workplace, lack of access to housing, and on and on. I would have never seen my own privilege if I had not been forced outside of my dominant culture by marrying a person of color and now having two children of color. I have become acutely aware of the ways in which my life is easy and unencumbered by racial strife.

Now to confess: (I hear its good for the soul) In my quest to *do something* during these times of unrest, I have been educating myself on whiteness, racism, empowerment, womanist theology, and the like. Maybe you've been doing the same. I am a sensitive person: the kind that cannot watch horror flicks read books about war atrocities, and sometimes even the bible confronts me. In an effort to protect myself, I have not wanted to watch the recorded killings of our black brothers and sisters. I have heard tell of the stories, which are frightful enough. But I made myself witness the atrocities. I clicked through one after another.

It was hideous.

I was aghast.

I confess I wanted to stop... hide my face from the cruelty of the world.

Then I watched Alton Sterling get killed.

Alton was unarmed.

Alton was a big man.

Alton reminds me of my youngest son, Brandon.

I confess. Until I had seen a man that looked like someone I loved, I was able to distance myself. I saw Alton needlessly, publicly murdered. I lost it.

God forgive me for not falling to my knees and weeping at every announcement of an unjust killing!

God forgive me for not being a witness to the destruction of your precious humanity!

God forgive me for not fighting more, for not being outraged more, for not screaming at the tops of my lungs, STOP!

What can heal us? What can bring us together as a nation?

Mutual apology, healing, and forgiveness offer a sustainable future for humanity. Otherwise, we are controlled by the past, individually and corporately. We all need to apologize, and we all need to forgive, or this human project will surely self-destruct.

If I don't confess, this is a barrier to grace and forgiveness, which we all need right now.

What I ask of you, Friends is for your witnessing our brothers and sisters in their grief and anger. Hold your judgment. Let God handle that part. Find some small thing you can do as an act of resistance, an act of solidarity. Find some small thing that brings more joy in the world for all people. Serve the downtrodden. Whatever it is, you'll find it. You and I are here to witness, love, and confess.

May God help us do so. Amen