

“To the Messy” / “As Yourself”

5.4: The Solution -- Confession

January 31, 2016

Statement re the towels ...

- Not about patting selves on the back – no names on the towels
- About celebrating what God can do through us
- About reminding selves who we are and what we are about
- Used to be known as the Mayberry church
- Want us to be known as the church that washes people’s feet

Now ... Most everybody here today is wearing long sleeves, even though this is a remarkably great weather day for January 31. Still, this is pretty solid long sleeve weather. But there are some folks in this room who will still be wearing long sleeves in August. Some of you, just because you are weird. And some of you, well ... you just stay cold, even in August.

But others will be covering something up. Have you seen those commercials for Humira or Stelara on TV? They treat Psoriasis. My brother used to wear long sleeves in summer to cover up his Psoriasis...

But others will be covering up self-inflicted wounds. We have people in our church family who have cut themselves, or burned themselves, or pierced themselves because of some deep emotional pain. And they cover it up with long sleeves. We have people who have attempted suicide, and they cover it up. Some of you may be covering up needle marks – tracks. Some may be covering up tattoos. My preaching partner Randy had a worship leader who asked permission to wear short sleeves for worship. His previous church had required him to wear long sleeves to cover his tats, even in summer. Randy told him he could take the mask off.

Well, most Jesus followers wear masks for the same reasons. Sometimes we wear them to hide wounds others have inflicted on us. And sometimes we wear masks to hide self-inflicted wounds. The point is, there are things about us we don’t want others to see.

- Sometimes it is embarrassment. Did you know that most of us Jesus followers have this sinking feeling that we are

underachievers spiritually? When we ponder the gifts God has given us, and the doors he has opened to us, we realize we could have, we should have -- we could have, we should have -- done so much more for the one we claim to love. We hide that embarrassment behind (*masks*) our hearty hugs and cheesy smiles and our god-talk.

- And a whole lot of Jesus followers wear these masks to cover up some pain, or anxiety, or flat-out fear. Some of you drove away this morning from a home that is just broken, you fought with your wife or your kids while on the road, and then you walked in here with a smile on your face, and a joke -- masks. Or you're dying financially -- you're scared to death -- but you passed through those doors with a mask on.
- And a whole lot of Jesus followers -- boatloads of us -- we wear these masks to cover our shame, our sin. There are these dark places inside us that we hope no one ever discovers. There are these thoughts we have, there are these things we have done. And we fear, if you knew that part of me, you wouldn't like me. If you knew that part of me, you wouldn't accept me.

So we wear masks. Come on! You know what I am talking about! You've worn them. You may have one, or two, or three of them on right now. But here's the deal: putting on a mask is like putting a band-aid on a cancer. It won't fix the problem. One of our elders, Doc Crum, said it was kind of like putting a skin graft over an abscess. Eventually the pus is going to pour out. Masks ... don't fix the problem. In fact, masks actually hinder the healing. Do you buy that?

Now Todd has been talking about our proclivity to wear masks for the last two weeks. Today we're going to talk about how and why we need to take them off. And we're going to talk about a really big biblical idea: the idea of "confession." Here's the way my preaching partner puts it (it's pretty good), he says: What you reveal, he can heal. You see, confession is the act of baring my wounds so God can heal them. What you reveal, he can heal.

Now guys, I'm going to do more teaching than preaching this morning. I'm going to move through quite a few ideas a little too fast. I'll try to make it as clear and compelling as I can so I really hope you will hang in

there. And I hope you'll do more than just hear what God tells us to do, I hope you'll do it. You see, I believe this "confession" is what God expects of us Jesus followers. Now if you are not a Jesus follower, this stuff may seem a little extreme to you. But I'm telling you, it will work for you too. This is how God designed it to work.

And if any of this stuff about these two paths – the path of pleasing God versus the path of trusting God -- and about these masks, and about taking these masks off is picking at your heart, I'd encourage you to get this book by John Lynch. It's called, *The Cure: What if God isn't who you think he is, and neither are you?* It's a great little book, and we've been drawing on it pretty heavily during this "As Yourself" series.

Well, let's dig in. We've kind of broken this idea of confession down into 4 pieces. Here's piece 1: Confess to self. When you do wrong, admit it. When you sin, own it. I acknowledge God wanted me to do A, and I did B, instead. God didn't want me to do C, and I did it anyway. I did wrong. I sinned.

Instead of confessing to self, here's what we tend to do – with these masks. "Yeah, I probably shouldn't have done that, but she made me mad." "Yeah, I know it was wrong, but I'm only human." "Yeah, I know I sinned, but everyone else is doing it, too!" We kind of admit our sin, but then we start tagging on our excuses, and our rationalizations, and our justifications, and our explanations, and our blame. Guys, that's not owning your sin, that's not how true confession starts.

You've probably heard how it works at Alcoholics Anonymous. "Hi, my name is Steve, and I am an alcoholic." And if you start making excuses they'll hose you. "Hi, my name is Steve, and I am an alcoholic, but it's my wife's fault." That won't cut it. "Hi, my name is Steve, and I am an alcoholic, but I'm only human." That won't cut it. No excuses, no rationalizations, no justifications, no blaming someone else. Just, "Hi, my name is Steve, and I sinned.

You see, Satan will do whatever he can to keep you from owning your sin. He'll help you make your excuses; he will suggest those rationalizations; he'll find you someone else you can blame. He'll even try to convince you that what you're doing isn't really sin at all. Because if you don't own it, you will never take it to God to heal it. You see, we

use all those “buts” to absolve ourselves, to mitigate, to minimize our sin. But what we don’t reveal, he can’t heal.

This is why Romans 7 is one of my favorite places in the whole Bible. Here is the apostle Paul. Paul is an “apostle,” he is one of the greatest leaders of the early church. He wrote nearly half the books of our New Testament. He’s a giant of the faith. And here’s how he “confesses.” He says, “I don’t really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do what I hate.” (7.15) No excuses, no rationalizing, no blaming someone else. He says, “I know what God wants, and I don’t do it.” He says, “I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.” (7.19) Guys, that’s confession to self. Have you ever been there, admitted that? I did wrong, no excuses. I sinned, no one else’s fault. Guys, you can’t take it to God for healing if you don’t own it first.

But then, piece 2, you’ve got to take it to God. Let me remind you about something we Jesus followers sometimes forget. Every sin I commit, every sin you commit, is a sin against God. You may be treating your wife wrong, but that’s also a sin against God. You may be lying to your boss at work, but that’s also a sin against God. Every sin I sin against you, every sin you sin against me, is also a sin against our God. Do you buy that?

And every sin breaks relationship. Every sin builds this wall between us and God. Sin does that: it builds walls that God does not honor. Every sin we sin creates this distance between us and God. Over and over again I have talked to Jesus followers who are so deep in sin that they can’t even pray any more. They don’t want to come to church. Because their sin has built this wall between them and God. Guys, even if you don’t recognize the wall, it’s still there, because unconfessed sin builds walls, between us and God.

So here’s what we do: we repent. In the New Testament the Greek word for repentance is “metanoia.” Two pieces: the “meta” piece means “with,” and the “noia” piece means “mind,” or “to think.” It means, “to agree with,” “to change your mind.” It means, I agree with God about what I have done. No excuses, no justifications, no blaming someone else. “You are right God, I sinned. I did wrong. And I am ... sorry.” Repentance is confessing to God.

The New Testament talks about repentance a lot; it uses the word 56 times. And a huge part of repentance is this confession part: I own my sin to me, and I own my sin to God. "You are right, God; I was wrong. I'm sorry. No excuses. I'm sorry." You ever been there, done that?

Now listen. You need to listen carefully, because this is easily misunderstood. Confession is not required for forgiveness. (repeat) When you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, he forgave you completely. If you are in Christ, you stand forgiven right now of every sin of your past, every sin you are struggling with right now, and as long as you stay in Christ, you are already forgiven for every sin you will struggle with till the day you die. God has forgiven you; he has clothed you in the righteousness of his Son. Thank God!

But even though you are forgiven, your sins still build a wall between you and God, and that wall robs you of the peace you are looking for, and the joy you hunger for. Guys, if you want to go through this life as a miserable Christian, you can. In fact, a lot of you guys are doing it right now. Pretty miserable, isn't it? But if you want to start experiencing what God meant for you, it will require some repenting. He cannot heal, what you try to keep hidden behind your masks.

I'll show you how it works. My favorite guy in the Old Testament is a guy named David, King David. David was a very flawed man; he was a big, bold sinner. And here's what he says: Psalms 32. He says, "What joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt (what joy is available to those who have been forgiven by God), whose lives are lived in complete honesty" (without masks). And David knows what he is talking about, because he has worn these masks. He says, "When I refused to confess my sin (when I tried to do life behind a mask), my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long (I was a miserable God-follower, like a lot of us). Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat." Been there, felt that. "Finally (David says), I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. (I took off the mask). I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone." Wouldn't that feel amazing? To be able to approach God without a mask? To do life without a mask? Because you know, in Christ, you are clean?!

So, piece 1: You confess your sin to you – you own your sin. Piece 2: You confess your sin to God – you repent. Piece 3: You confess your sin to the one you wronged, you confess your sin to the one you harmed. This is important, guys. Here's what the Bible says. It says, "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." (James 5.16)

Ladies, when you wrong your husband, fess up. Guys when you wrong your wife, fess up. Or that sin will create a wedge between you. Kids, if you sin against your parents, confess it. That sin will drive a wedge between you and them. Or maybe you've gossiped about a friend. Maybe you cheated someone. Maybe you lost your temper and spoke words that should never have been spoken. Maybe you were cruel, or thoughtless, or self-centered and you hurt someone. Guys, sin corrupts relationships. And guys, God can't heal what you won't reveal.

Now the kind confession I am talking about isn't the kind of confession a lot of us try to get away with. Have you ever done this: "I'm sorry ... but ..." "I'm sorry, but you started it." "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have lost my temper, but you were being stupid." "I'm sorry, but a man can only take so much." "I'm sorry, but ..." And with your "buts" you excuse yourself, and rationalize your misbehavior, and blame someone else for your sin. With your "buts" you absolve yourself, you mitigate and minimize your sin. With your "buts" you pretty much guarantee that your "apology" will not be accepted, and the wall will not come down. That's hard, isn't it? To say "I'm sorry" with no "buts" attached? Because you know that part of the wrong is theirs, but that's between God and them. Your job, as a Jesus follower, is to confess the part you own.

Now here's what makes this especially important. Did you know that unconfessed sin against a brother doesn't just throw up a wall between me and my brother, it also throws up a wall between me and God? It does! Remember, a sin against you is also a sin against God. My refusal to own my sin against you corrupts my intimacy with God.

Listen to the way Jesus put it. He says, "If you enter your place of worship and, about to make an offering, you suddenly remember a grudge a friend has against you (you have wronged him), abandon your offering, leave immediately, go to this friend and make things right. Then and only then, come back and work things out with God." (Matthew 5.23-24) You see, if you try to worship God during a time

when you know you owe a husband, a wife, a parent, a friend, a colleague an apology, God would rather you go try to make things right, before you step up to one of these tables. Wow! That ought to give us pause sometimes, shouldn't it? And yet, some of us would rather persist in our stubborn refusal to apologize rather than have peace ... with God. But that's no way to live ... no way to really live.

Now, there may be exceptions to this rule. There may be times when you cannot confess your sin to someone you harmed – they may be gone, or dead. In that case, just take it to God and pray for that person you hurt. And there may be times when your confession might hurt a person even more than you already have. Maybe they don't know what terrible things you've said about them, and confessing your sin would harm them even more. But usually when you hurt someone, they know it. So "Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

One more piece. Piece one: Confess your sin to yourself – own it, no more excuses. Piece 2: Confess your sin to God, because every sin is a sin against God. Piece 3: Confess your sin to the one you sinned against. What you refuse to reveal, he can't heal. Piece 4: Sometimes, sometimes you need to find a confidant, an accountability partner, a brother or a sister, to whom you can confess your struggles, who will speak truth to you and hold you accountable.

At one time the smartest man in the world was a guy named Solomon. Here's the way he put it. He says, "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble."
(Ecclesiastes 4.9-10)

My preaching partner, Randy, does some of that for me. He knows some things about me even my wife doesn't know. And there are times he has spoken truth to me, truth I really didn't want to hear. And I suppose I do some of the same for him. Because two are stronger than one. I know that good wife, or a good husband does some of that for a spouse. But I think a God-honoring woman needs another God-honoring woman who can speak God's truth to her, with grace. And a God-honoring man needs another God-honoring man who can speak God's truth to him, with grace. Because two are stronger than one.

It's got to be the right kind of person. The wrong kind of accountability partner can do such damage. There are all kinds of people – even Christians – who get off on hearing about your sins. That's wrong. You don't need help from a voyeur. There are all kinds of people – even Christians – who are going to gossip about what you tell them. You don't need help from a gossip. And there are all kinds of people – even Christians – who will be judgmental, or who will give you advice that is not God-honoring. You don't need help from them either. You need to find a person who is rooting for your success as a Jesus follower, who will take your secrets to the grave, and who will speak 100% God's truth to you with 100% God's grace. That's a rare person ... and such a gem.

Guys, these masks are killing us. But God gives us the antidote – confession.

Guys, we want to be the kind of church where you don't need a mask. In fact, we want to be the kind of church that challenges you to take off your mask, so you can experience the healing, and the peace, and the joy God made you for.

Last week Todd talked about Adam and Eve in the garden. Before they sinned they were naked and unashamed in the presence of God. After they sinned they tried covering themselves with these fig leaves (these masks), and because their relationship with God was corrupted, they tried hiding from him in the bushes. Guys, your masks don't fool God. He knows where you've been, he knows what you'd done, he knows what you're thinking, and for some reason he loves you anyway. But he wants you to take off your masks. He'll heal what you reveal. He's good at that.

We've given you a mask this morning. It's a little piece of plastic. But it represents the masks we wear in this place nearly every week. Are you willing to take it off? Do you want to be healed? If you do, when you go to the worship station, there's a basket there. And when you drop this mask into that basket, you're telling God, "I'm a sinner, no excuses. And I want to feel that grace flowing through me all over again." ...