“Lent in Pieces: Repenting”  
(Psa.51:4-6)

This morning we look at another piece in our series called “Lent in Pieces”. We are examining the words of David found in Psalm 51, which is his prayer to God after being confronted with his sins of adultery and murder. In this series we are looking at different elements of the season of Lent to prepare us for the events of Jesus death and resurrection. Through these messages I want us to understand that clearing a crowded heart from sin, distractions, worries, or any number of things that clutter our souls, prepares us to celebrate an empty tomb.

Last week we heard David confessing his sin, trusting God’s unfailing love to cleanse his soul from unrelenting guilt of what he had done. You may be new to church; just coming back to church or have been in church a long time and all this talk about guilt and confessing makes you very uncomfortable. Regardless of how uncomfortable we are, confessing is not where we want to stay because even though you may own your sin and admit the guilt, you have to move beyond it. That’s why the next piece of our mosaic is so important, it’s called “repenting”. When you hear that word you may imagine all kinds of negative ideas. The best way to think about repenting is it is like physical therapy for the wounds sin has left in your soul. The role of physical therapy is to get a person back to their life by restoring movement, confidence and strength to an injury. It hurts because pain is still part of the injury but if a person doesn’t literally move through and beyond the pain they will not be restored. It’s one thing to admit to God we have sinned but we can’t stay there. Confessing admits we are broken but repenting is the step toward healing.

In the Bible “repenting” involves more than being sorry for what we have done but wanting to change because of what we have done. Guilt is all about feeling. Repenting is about changing. For me to change though I must grasp the reality of my sin as God sees it. In Psalm 51:4-6 David takes the recognition of his sin beyond a confession before God to admit the damage his sin has caused. In Psalm 51:4 he says, “Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight.” On the surface you think he is forgetting about how far reaching his sin has gone. What about Bathsheba, her husband and his leadership as king? Don’t they count? They do but what David is saying is he sees his sin of adultery and murder as ultimately a breaking of God’s standard or law. The commandments prohibit taking another person’s spouse or taking their life and David has done both. God has set boundaries for our lives and David admits he has broken God’s rules for living in relationship with him.

That’s why he says, “You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.” In other words he knows he has broken God’s standards and is willing to accept whatever the consequences are for what he has done. Our culture refuses to admit there is a standard for moral behavior but God has standards, boundaries, rules and there are consequences when those are broken. David admits he knew God’s rules, broke God’s rules and God’s rules are always right.

David takes ownership of defying God’s rules all the way back to its source: his own human nature. He says, “For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.” (Psa. 51:5) We like to think we come into this world without any moral defects and either my genetics, circumstances or how I was raised, are to blame for who I am and what I do. That’s partly true but David is saying is our human nature is morally broken from the start. We are all hard-wired to a pattern of behavior that somewhere, somehow or in someway we are going to prove we are broken by our own sin. If it were true we were morally perfect from the beginning someone would have found a way to preserve that perfection to keep moral defects from happening. The reason they haven’t is because it can’t be done. The problem is not on the outside it’s on the inside because we come into this world broken.
The last thing we are going to look at this morning is the hardest because David takes ownership of his sin to the deepest possible level in his soul. “But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.”(Psa. 51:6) I want to drill down here to get the full impact of what he means. The words “…honesty from the womb…” mean reliability at the core of a person’s life. The word “honesty” or “truth” doesn’t mean perfection but accountability. God desires our lives to be so fully open that the one thing he can count on is we will be reliable or accountable to always be open with God. The next phrase digs the deepest: he desires accountability at all times, beginning to end, and at every level of life-outside and inside. The word “womb” comes from a word that means “the inmost place” or really “the plugged up place”. It’s used in the Old Testament when a well or spring was plugged up to prevent water from flowing to where it was needed. Stopping the flow of water to an enemy stronghold was a common practice to prevent them from having what was necessary to survive.

Applying that concept to us means God wants open access to those parts of our lives we have willfully chosen to keep deeply hidden or “plugged up” from him. We fear being vulnerable before God and pretend he can’t know or go into the hidden, secret places of our hearts. David is saying he is willing to “unplug” the inner parts of himself so that the streams of honesty can flow again in his life. What is it you think you have successfully “plugged up” deep within you and no one knows? I’m not talking about some act of moral failure but the source of the failure. Robert Mullholand calls them “trust structures”, places where we are held hostage by our own fears, anxieties or control issues with God or people. (Ruth Haley Barton, “Sacred Rhythms”, p. 103)

How do we get to such a place of freedom, healing and releasing the flow of God’s life within us? Through a process called: Repentance. As I said repentance is beyond being sorry for our sin, its wanting to change the source or cause of the sin. How can we change something so deep and attached to our mind or behavior? Very simply let me point you to seven things, not original with me, but I know will help us all change.

- **Focus on one thing at a time:** You have a lot of things you know need changing but you can only handle one at a time.
- **Focus on one day at a time:** You didn’t get where you are all at once and you won’t change all at once but one small bite at a time.
- **Focus on God’s power not your will power:** If your will to change were enough you already would have changed and you don’t need God. You haven’t changed because you need God’s power to help you.
- **Focus on what you want not what you don’t want:** Whatever has your attention has you. The more you focus on not doing something that only insures you’ll do it. We have to refocus on what we want to happen by using God’s word to realign our thinking.
- **Focus on doing good not feeling good:** It’s hard but simple: We act our way into feeling not feel our way into acting. If you want to change then act like it don’t wait to feel like it.
- **Focus on people who will help me change not stop me from changing:** Change doesn’t happen in a vacuum; it happens with other people. You will never change the hardest thing without someone else who can help you.
- **Focus on progress not perfection:** You will never change perfectly and if you wait to be perfect you will stay defeated. Change happens through a process over time. (Adapted from Rick Warren, The Road to Recovery, Part 5)

In a sermon called "Total Nakedness” Kevin Kim tells the story of a family and their six year old during an Ash Wednesday service where people have an opportunity to write their sins on a piece of paper, fold
the paper, and then pin it onto a wooden cross as a reminder of Christ's forgiveness. When the family grabbed a sheet of paper and started writing their confessions, their son did the same and started writing with large, clear block letters. The rest of his family wrote their confessions, folded the sheets so no one could see the sins they had written down. They intentionally left their names off and walked to the cross and pinned their "sins" on the cross. The son wrote, "God, I'm sorry because I lie." But then signed his name, and refused to fold it. He walked to the front and pinned it to the cross. His parents asked, "Why did you put your name on it? Don't you want to fold it up so no one can see?" Then he said, "I wrote my name on it because I want everyone to see it. Because if they know it was me, maybe they can help me stop." (Kevin Kim, from the sermon "Total Nakedness") That’s repentance, moving beyond confession to change.

David said, “...you want to see what’s in the places I’ve tried to hide…” (Psa. 51:6) If we let ourselves see what God already knows is there we will let him help us change. Isn’t it time we unplugged so life can flow again? That’s where change begins and repentance starts. It’s one step closer to the joy of Easter’s empty tomb!

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