

Repentance

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ... Ephesians 1:7

This past week, my wife and I had the opportunity to watch our wedding video again. It was heartwarming to reflect and remember that day and all those who were able to be there with us. Reliving that moment, brought back many thankful and happy memories. As I watched, there was one personal disappointment that I had with the occasion. I regret not being able to allow my emotions to show with greater ease.

Seeing my face as Madeline began her walk down the aisle, it's very obvious that I'm what you call a "feelings-stuffer". Instead of going with the emotions of the moment, I tried to control and compartmentalize my feelings resulting in my face displaying something more like I was mad, in pain or constipated – I'm not sure which is the best description. Regardless, watching that moment again was a clear reminder that I'm a pretty stubborn "feelings-stuffer" and all my work to compartmentalize my emotions really isn't as effective as I might like to think.

Certainly, there are many times when compartmentalizing things is quite healthy and good. Much of our task orientated lives need compartmentalization. We have emails that need immediate action and others that can wait. There are errands that need to get accomplished no matter how we feel and other errands we can push off until we feel like it. Some events we must attend while others we can choose to fit into our schedules whenever we want. Even difficult experiences and situations need to be compartmentalized for a time and addressed at a later date. Yes, compartmentalizing can be such a blessing, but truth be told, so often it can really be such a challenge.

It can be a blessing to compartmentalize our work life from our personal life, but a real tempting challenge lurks as we pursue such disconnection in order to hide, ignore or cover up things from one life with the other. Similar challenge with church, there can be a version of ourselves that we show in the pew to attempt to balance out the version of ourselves we'd prefer at home. Likewise, between friends and family, we'll behave a certain way to just get by with family and then turn on the real connection and engagement with friends. Ultimately, we do this with God. We compartmentalize our sin so that we can delay and even deny God's call to repentance and reception of His gift of forgiveness.

The readings from Amos and Mark this weekend, depict two examples of compartmentalizing sin that really mirror our own lives. In our first reading, the prophet Amos is called to preach the need for repentance to the people of Israel. This people had grown into experts at compartmentalizing their sin. They created high places for worship to foreign idols. They built additional sanctuaries to remove the need to go to the temple in Jerusalem. And like the other nations around them, they latched onto their earthly king and his earthly ways. Things had gotten so out of line, that the priest Amaziah, serving in a role that was supposed to proclaim God's will, was bold enough to tell off God's chosen prophet, Amos. Israel's compartmentalizing of their sin disconnected them so much from God that they hated His messengers and the words He sent them to proclaim.

Parallel to this Amos account, Mark's Gospel reading, reveals that things hadn't changed too much years later. As Jesus grew in fame, King Herod was taking note. Like many others of his day, Herod didn't know what to make of Jesus. However, Mark tells us that Herod was wrongly convinced that Jesus was John the Baptist resurrected. This mistaken conviction led to a reflection upon John the Baptist's and Herod's connection highlighting Herod's compartmentalizing of his own sin.

John the Baptist faithfully served His calling from the Lord to preach repentance to all, even King Herod. John called out Herod's unlawful marriage which set John on a path to martyrdom. At first, Herod tried to deal with John through imprisonment, protecting John from Herodias and keeping himself in control. Then at the fateful birthday party, Herod, in order to continue to compartmentalize his sin and

keep face in front of his guests, gives into Herodias' daughter's request for John's death. And although this sadden King Herod, his sorrow wasn't the remorse of repentance.

In fact, Herod continued in his unrepentance even when face to face with Jesus. A couple years after Jesus' growth in fame led to Herod's concern about John the Baptist's returning from the dead, Jesus was brought before Herod at Pontius Pilate's request. The Bible tells us, that Herod was happy to see Jesus because he longed to see some sort of miracle from Jesus. However, Herod had compartmentalized his sin so much and grown so disconnected from God that Jesus' silence and inaction before him led Herod to grow so bold that he mocked and scorned Jesus, the very Son of God, to his face. Little did Herod know or understand that Jesus was about to deliver His greatest miracle of all, dying and rising for the sins of the whole world, even Herod's sin with his unlawful marriage to Herodias.

Like the people of Amos' day and King Herod, we too regularly compartmentalize our sin before God. How often have our worship practices included idols and other additions different from God's Word so that we can hide, ignore or cover up what God really expects? Who or what else have we latched onto as our "saviors" because Jesus isn't enough in our eyes? Have we even grown bold enough to box God's Word in, mock it, or worse yet, try and send God's Word away because we don't want to hear it anymore? Have we compartmentalized our sin so much that we're willing to join in with others in openly disrespecting God with our words and actions? Are we more often saddened by what other sinners think of us, than what God thinks of our sin?

Fellow stubborn "sin-stuffers" the last thing we need to do is compartmentalize our sin before God. All this does is delay and prevent our repentance and rob us of a relationship that truly deals with our sin. Christ Jesus has dealt with our sin properly. He lived, died and rose for you and me so that we might freely come before God confessing our sins because in Christ, He has shown us that He is faithful to forgive our sins. Here in His presence, we don't need to keep stuffing our sins into our past because He has taken them to the cross and paid for them. He has taken our sins to the grave and buried them. Rising again, He has changed our future inheritance from one of eternal death to one of eternal life. By His Word and Work He has cut us off from continually stuffing our sins and instead fills us with the Holy Spirit and grace.

This is why He alone is the object of our worship and praise. For He alone has dealt with our sin. He has made Himself our full and complete Savior and delivers His full and complete salvation to us through His Words and Sacraments. He washes away our sin with the waters of Baptism and cleanses and nourishes our souls through Holy Communion. He rejoices over us as His chosen people and by His declaration of forgiveness provides us with eternal value and respect that the world cannot give.

He leads us to honest and sincere service to Him and to our neighbors. Knowing the forgiveness that He has won and given to us, we are freed to admit to others our shortcomings and failures seeking their forgiveness and support as we seek to change our ways. We are freed to give forgiveness to those who sin against us instead of ignoring, overlooking or holding on to their offenses. We are freed to live authentically as humble Christians and not selfishly as prideful sinners. We are invited to continually confess our sins not to compartmentalize them so He might constantly remind us that in Christ we are His forgiven children.

Today, this week, this month, this year, may the Lord open our hearts and minds to recognize where we have compartmentalized our own sin and delayed and denied His call to repentance. May the Lord lead, guide and direct us to instead confess our sins seeking His forgiveness and grace that He so freely and abundantly gives. In Christ, we no longer have to be "sin-stuffers" because He has stuffed our sins into His death and burial. In Christ, we are His chosen and loved people now and for eternity. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Sheaffer