



CONFESSION & REPENTANCE

((Outside))

As you walk outside from the auditorium, breathe deep the beauty of the evening, and of this place we get to call home, San Diego. The sun is setting, and this is one of those moments where you want to take a picture and send it to your friends who are still shaking off the last vestiges of winter in the Midwest. What a gift this place is. But there's something else in the air. Do you smell it? Maybe to you the smell of burning wood is nostalgia of camping, of nights outdoors with friends. But something is being destroyed by that fire. In the midst of all the beauty that surrounds us, we also live in the midst of destruction, disintegration and death.

As you are able, follow your nose, and the flames, and make your way over to the fire pit in the back parking lot.

On the night that Jesus was arrested, Peter found himself around a fire, not unlike this one. Jesus had been taken by the temple guards, and Peter fled, along with the other 10 remaining disciples, one of them not even getting away with his cloak. As fearful as he was, he had to see what was happening to Jesus. So he followed him. Had he pulled a hood over his head to hide his face? Was he walking as quietly as possible behind the procession of guards manhandling Jesus, making sure not to crunch on gravel or snap twigs? At the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, he found what he assumed was a discreet spot to nonchalantly warm himself by the fire, while keeping an eye on Jesus and the mock trial taking place in the priest's courtyard. It was here that his backwoods Galilean accent got him into trouble, as a young girl not only recognized his accent, but his face. And it happened. He denied Christ. Denied that he knew him. Denied that he was his friend. Three times. He was so caught up in his cover story that he didn't catch himself. In fact, it wasn't until Jesus' predicted rooster-crow broke the pre-dawn quiet that the quiet inside Peter broke. No. It didn't break, it shattered. Peter had betrayed the one who had loved him best. And he was undone. To see in yourself the very worst version of you, and to realize you have hurt the one you owe everything to. Those are desperate times.

What I'd like to ask you to do tonight is to use the pieces of paper provided for you near the fire pit to help you consider and write down a significant way that you too have rebelled against the Father, or denied the Son, or quenched the Spirit. If you are a Christian who knows you are already forgiven, then let what you write be a memorial to the forgiving work that Christ has done in your life. And if there is sin to confess, then use this opportunity to write it down, and receive Christ's forgiveness. If you are not a Christian, then when you confess to God, you are asking him to forgive you because of what Christ has done, and to make you new. And if you are a Christian, he has already forgiven you. So confession means that, **first**, you **agree** with him that your sin is sin. **Second**, you **thank** him for his forgiveness in your life, remembering it with humble joy. And **third**, you repent. In your mind and heart, and with your life and actions, by the power of the Holy Spirit you choose to go God's way, and not your way.

What we remember more than anything on this day is that ***we can do nothing; he does everything.*** Is there a fear you have? A way you perform? A spiritual fervor or moral performance you're trying to prove? Something about God's call on your life that you are keeping at arms-length? What is it that you need to **STOP doing** (your deadly doing), so that you can receive, or live in, the gift of this salvation. In Christ, you have no one to impress, and nothing to prove, and by faith, before the Father you are justified, righteous, redeemed, reconciled, and made new. **And it had nothing to do with you. Thank him for everything.**

But let's not leave it there, on the paper, in your hand – because that's not where God leaves it. Take that piece of paper to the fire, and let it be consumed in the furnace of God's just judgment, which fell on Jesus as he hung on the cross in your place. **Psalm 103:8-13** says - *⁸ The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. ⁹ He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; ¹⁰ he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; ¹² as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;*

Let the incinerating tongues of fire be a visible, memorable symbol to you that all your efforts to gain your own righteousness are an empty void. Lay that deadly doing down, let God remove it from you. Like Peter, we have denied Christ around countless firepits of many shapes and circumstances. But God does not leave us there. Cast your deadly doing into the fire, and lay your sin upon the innocent Jesus, who takes it for you, to make you free.