



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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March 5, 2014

Ash Wednesday

Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 7:8-13a](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Numbers 21:4-9](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 32](#)

Second Lesson: [2 Corinthians 7:8-13a](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 18:9-14](#)

“I Do Not Regret It”

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

Picture yourself in this scene... you're in an Intensive Care Unit, tubes coming out of your mouth breathing for you, hooked up to all kinds of wires, sounds beeping around you, a big gash in your body where someone had put the blade and stuck it in you and you almost died. You're family is there with you. You can't talk because there is that tube there. In walks the guy who stuck you with the blade. He stands at the foot of your bed and says, "I'm not sorry I did it. I'd do it again in a minute." How would you feel?

Would you feel a little different if it was your doctor who had just done the bypass surgery on you? So now you have these stitches in your chest that go 10"-12" and you are going to take awhile to heal. But without it, you wouldn't have the tube in your throat, you'd have dirt over your head. Do you think you might feel a little different about the injury that person caused to you? I would assume so. I think you might even want to thank him.

That's kind of the situation that Paul described for the Corinthians. He writes to them in his second letter and says, "I know I hurt you, but the injury had a purpose. I don't regret it. I'd do it again." He wrote words that had hurt them, that shamed them, that literally knocked them to their knees when he pointed out their sin. He wasn't just doing it to make them feel bad. He wasn't just delighting in making them feel bad. He wanted it to accomplish godly sorrow that led to repentance, a sorrow over sin that led them back to the Savior that they knew and believed in, who was Jesus Christ.

What he had written about in his first letter was that these people were bragging about how advanced they were. They were saying, "Look at how loving and tolerant we are that we have this guy that lives among us and is a part of our congregation who is caught in the sin of incest, and we're saying we are loving because we say it's okay. Other people would say it's wrong, but we are so advanced and loving." So Paul had to write them and say, "A little yeast works through the whole batch. Get rid of this person that is committing this sin. Hand him over to Satan. Lead him to repentance, and then you repent of saying that this is a good and godly thing when God has clearly said to you that it is not." He wrote words that from what he says here troubled him. He wrote them and sent them off, and it's not like he got a text back in three minutes on how they responded. He had to wait a long time. As he had to wait a long time, no doubt he had

doubts and worries creep in. “What if these words just lead them to harden their hearts and not turn back to the Lord? What if it doesn’t lead them to godly sorry that leads to repentance? What if they get angry and leave Christianity and go back to worshipping false gods? What if they don’t listen? What if they defend it? What if they excuse it? What if they rationalize it? What if they don’t repent? Maybe I could have done this better? Maybe I could have done that better?” He had to have some of the things go through his head that Satan often uses to keep you and me from speaking. I’ve talked to people and they say, “I can’t tell someone else what they are doing is wrong because maybe I’ll say something wrong. Maybe I’ll make it worse.” So we don’t say anything and just hope maybe someone else will.

Thankfully, for the Corinthians sake, that wasn’t Paul’s approach. His love for them and their eternal souls led him to write and led him to speak harsh words that accomplished their purpose. When the news came back that they had taken this man and admonished him and admonished themselves for what they had done, and they repented, and then we are told that they put this man out of the congregation and it led him to repent and he said, “Please forgive me.” They wouldn’t do it. They were afraid they might have screwed that up then too. So Paul had to write them and say, “Receive him back. Forgive him. I have forgiven him. The Lord forgave him. You know what Jesus has done to take away our sins, so please welcome him back.” It had to bring joy to his heart to know that this led to godly repentance, not just worldly repentance, because worldly repentance leads to death.

Do you ever wonder what that meant? I suppose there are a couple of options for worldly sorrow that leads to death, which isn’t repentance but worldly sorrow over sin. I think one thing could be what you might have experienced as a child. Did mom and dad ever go away and tell you not to do something and you did it and they came home and found out you did it? Were you really sorry that you got caught? Not that you disobeyed but that you got caught disobeying, and the only thing you learned is next time I have to get better at disobeying? Have you ever had that experience? That’s a sorrow over being caught. It’s a worldly sorrow. That’s not a godly sorrow that is genuine repentance. I don’t know if that’s what he’s thinking about.

Or, I don’t know if he’s thinking about true sorrow. The realization that God hates this sin and I’ve committed this sin and I should rot in hell forever. True sorrow that doesn’t lead to repentance but leads to despair. I think an example there would be Judas, wouldn’t it? When he threw those 30 silver coins back at the feet of those who had given it to him, do you think he was sorry that he had betrayed the Son of God? I think so. I think he knew that he was a sinner. He was terribly sorry and he despaired. He didn’t go to God for forgiveness. We are told he went out and hung himself in his despair. That wasn’t repentance. That was just sorrow. Godly sorrow is being that sorry for your sin and understanding what it deserves, but then going to the cross of Christ and seeing that he took it away and knowing that your Lord loves you, not because you’re so good but because he’s so good. He’s so loving. He’s so perfect. That’s godly sorrow and that’s what happened in the Corinthians.

This time of the year we start Lent and we focus on repentance and we focus on sorrow. We had that whole long confession. That's a lot longer confession than we usually use, right? As we read through some of those phrases, either you read them or I read them, who did you picture in your mind? Did you picture that coworker that really annoys you? Did you think of one of your kids that really should be paying attention to this part because here's where they struggle? Did you think of your spouse? Did they catch that part about being more patient? Who did you think about? It's easy to picture someone else, isn't it? It's a lot harder I think for us at times to see these things in ourselves. This is what Lent is all about. Time to be still. Time to be silent. Time to look at ourselves and see where our thoughts, our words and our actions are at variance with what our God has told us to do. How about giving up for Lent excuses. Give up for Lent rationalizations of your sins. Just meet them head on with the cross of Christ. You and I are good at rationalizations. You and I are good at our excuses.

I preached the sermon this morning. I go home and Paula and I are talking about something. Ben said something and I answered with something smart, as I'm prone to do. So my wife looks at me and says, "How come you tell us not to be sassy in your sermons and you turn around and be sassy 10 minutes later?" Do you think I liked hearing that? Do you think I had a bunch of reasons why what I said wasn't that bad? But did I need to hear that? Yes. I can say it's not that big of a deal. It's just a joke. It's this, this or that. But if it portrays an attitude that isn't loving, that isn't loving God and loving others, then it is sin. I can't just hide behind "I'm a smart aleck. That's just who I am." It's sin. You and I are really good at seeing the sin in each other. We're really not so good at seeing our own sin.

When you heard that Gospel tonight, who did you think of more? Who did you see yourself as, the guy standing at a distance saying "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner," or did you see in yourself at all the Pharisee? "Lord, I thank you that I'm me and you're lucky to have me." Do you ever think to yourself if other members of the church would do more of the things that I do, our church would be better? When we think that, aren't we standing in the shoes or the sandals of the Pharisees? Don't you and I struggle with this?

This is what Lent is a time to be... it's a time to be honest. It's a time to realize I don't deserve any of this love from my God, but he's given it to me. That should change me. It should change me to lead me to want to struggle against those sins, not to excuse them, not to rationalize them. It should lead me to want to aim my love not just at myself but at God and my neighbor. That's who he told me to love with all my heart and all my soul and my mind, right? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. All too often you and I love ourselves with all our heart and all our soul and our mind, and our neighbor and God get the leftovers.

This Lent, let's all just work at doing that better... loving God. Loving each other. Let's work at speaking words that reflect the love of Christ. Let's even work at thinking thoughts that reflect the love of Christ, even for those people we don't like and even for

those people we don't agree with. Love them because Christ loved them and died for them. The most amazing thing is, when you get honest with yourself during Lent and you see yourself for what you are, and then you stop and think he still gave his body and blood for me, he still washes away my sins, I'm still covered in his righteousness that he robed me with at my baptism, you're God becomes an amazing, awesome God to you. It's not a burden then to try to live for him better. It's a joy because you're Lord loves you that much. Amen.