

It's the act of confession....that's the prayer of the contrite heart. And since the reformation, protestants have turned up their noses at the weekly penitential sacrament of confession practice within the church of Rome since the second century. According to the Roman Catholic tradition, six things happen in the sacrament of confession: reconciliation with God, reconciliation with the church, the remission of eternal punishment, the remission of temporal punishment, peace and serenity, and an increase in spiritual strength.

Protestants have been so dead set against the formal practice of confession that we've actually forgotten what a contrite heart feels like. And in our modern culture, in our modern, litigious, blame seeking culture, we don't dare be vulnerable by sharing our contrite heart.

I'll agree that we get pretty caught up in the right and wrong, the good and the bad language of judgment when we look at other people's behaviour. In fact we're pretty good at beating ourselves up over all the crummy things we say and do, the crummy things we've come to believe about ourselves that have been piled up over the years of lousy messages, from whatever source. We have come to believe the lousy things we've heard about ourselves and not the gospel message that "you are the beloved, with whom God is well pleased."

But there are moments when we come to contrition. Moments we know in our hearts we have not measured up to our own expectations of ourselves. I'm not talking about some imposed hierarchy of wrong doing, but those moments when we've not met our own hopes and dreams for ourselves. And there are moments when contrary to our own self perception of grandeur, particularly in a group, like a congregation, or a city, or a nation, when someone screws up their courage to remind us that we haven't come close to our delusions about ourselves.

(Sing as the deer pants for the water, vs 1 and chorus)

I love how music helps us pray; particularly the prayer of the contrite heart. Joel and Matt began and did you hear those lyrics "we will run and scream, you will dance with me. We'll fulfill our dreams and we'll be free. We'll be who we are and they'll heal our scars, sadness will be far away.

We can't get there...we can't be free, we can't run and scream, we can't be transformed if we do not acknowledge our contrition. Daniel, like the Revelation to John, is one of the hardest books of the bible to meet. It's filled with apocalyptic images that feel like threats to comfortable folks like us. Daniel addresses the consequences of what anyone might image the "end" to look like. And in the text Doug read, right in the middle of the second half of Daniel, there is a prayer of contrite heart. And not just by an individual. This is a prayer acknowledging that the whole created order from highest to the lowest has not lived into the vision set before us by God.

In the end, God will prevail, that's basically the message of Daniel, Isaiah, the Revelation to John. God will prevail only when we acknowledge our role, our individual and collective role in detouring God's agenda. The prayer of the contrite heart, the prayer of confession, like the fifth step in the alcoholics anonymous program, acknowledges that we have a role in all manner of human behaviour. We have a role in the sinfulness of the world, the separation from God. The prayer of the contrite heart is an acknowledgement of that role. We will not be well if we do not acknowledge our role.

(sing VU #462 Before I take the Body of My Lord vs 1 and 2))

And there's nothing we have to do in the prayer of the contrite heart. Nothing. There is no need to fix anything. We don't have to make it go away, we don't have to do anything. When we experience the trouble and beauty of our world, we only need to hold it.

I think especially of Lynn Valley United Church and the prayer of the contrite heart. There are lots of things to celebrate, this is a very special place. So much is good and faithful and lovely. And yet, there is a lament in me. I think of all the children and youth and families we wish would be here. We think in one year of allocating significant financial resources to this worthy ministry, there should be a great change in whose who are here. But it just isn't so.

I think of the groups, the seekers, the sunrisers, the men's club, She Shares, the choirs – each experiencing a change in their roles, a change in their influence on decision making, a change in how they perceive themselves, a change in the energy they have for the projects they used to undertake. In our fear and our sadness we have been unloving and inhospitable. And I think about how in that vulnerability, there is no way we have the capacity to expose our contrite heart.

You know...there is nothing to be done, we simply need to hold this. Music helps.

Sing Out of the depths Oh God.

I had a friend visit me from Calgary this week. As we were walking to dinner in the westend on Thursday, he said to me "I can not wrap my head around the fact that Canada's poorest postal code (the downtown eastside) and Canada's most affluent postal code (West Vancouver ) are a half hour drive from one another. How can this be?" On Facebook recently, I said I recently wandered around the downtown eastside for five hours with my friend Sandra Severs and discovered that my nice white middle class sensibilities haven't a clue what to do there. I just know that there is a direct correlation between the economic poverty of the downtown eastside and the spiritual poverty of the upwardly mobile seeking grace in the quest for the biggest house. Sometimes music simply helps us hold the obvious.

(Sing If I have been the source of Pain MV #76 verse three)

I had a wonderful time last week in worship. I was finally able to put Remembrance Sunday in a place of calm. A friend visiting from Victoria said by hearing Antony Holland's story, we revered the story of every one he mentioned. By reverencing all those stories, we revered the story of those in this congregation whose lives have been dramatically altered by war. She said it was holy ground last week; it could not have been more worshipful. And the lovely addition is that in generosity, those who attended last week made it possible for the church to realize a small financial gain. How great.

But while we were worshipping and enjoying the gifts of an icon in Vancouver's theatre community, a young Palestinian boy was killed by Israeli gunfire while he was playing soccer. I don't need to get into an argument of whose story is more biased, whose story has the greater media attention. I just know that as we tried to honour those who paid an ultimate sacrifice in war – and at least one of those wars to end all wars, a young boy was killed playing soccer by military gunfire. I can't fix it in this moment; I just have to name it. Music helps.

(Sing VU #615 When Quiet Peace is Shattered, verse 1)

Today, the scriptures hold up a prayer from Daniel, which helps us to put the prayer of the contrite heart in its rightful place. It belongs to all of us, whatever

position we hold or whatever stage of life we're in. There is nothing to be done, with our tender confessions, or those moments when we go against the status quo, and name the contradictions. We simply need to hold it.

I love the quote for the moment for meditation, for it speaks exactly of the need. Let's have a look at it again

"Certainly when despair grows within us I may feel hard to pray, but pray is what we must do. Pray to give voice to our truth. Pray to avoid denial. Pray to remember that we are not the first, nor will we be the last, to know the dark night of the soul. Pray with faith that a miracle will be born not out of our own doing, but from the unconscious depths of our BEING."

(Sing V|U 619 Vs 4 and chorus)