

## Confession

Psalm 103, Luke 23:39-43

Center Church, Hartford

July 15, 2018

The Rev. Dr. Rochelle A. Stackhouse

It's so interesting to be worshiping today in a cemetery. Every once in a while, it is good to be reminded that life is short and that every day is a gift of grace to be lived. When I am with people who know they are dying, I often ask if there is any unfinished business they have. I don't mean bills to be paid, I mean relationships that need to be healed or truths that need to be told or forgiveness sought or given. I say the same thing to the people closest to the person dying. Sometimes people have done or said what is needful, and peace comes. Sometimes there are conversations that need to be had or letters written. Being near death compels honesty about our lives.

That certainly was the case for one of the men who hung on the cross next to Jesus. He fully admitted he had committed a crime. He took the opportunity to ask Jesus for forgiveness, which he received with this amazing promise that he would be with Jesus in paradise. Can you imagine the freedom that flooded this man's spirit as he suffered? I don't know the stories of most of the people who died so long ago and were buried here, but I hope that same kind of soul peace came to their lives before death.

Beloved, here's the secret though. You don't have to wait until death is near! Jesus taught what the Psalmist knew millennia before Jesus came: God is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and abounding in steadfast (womblike) love. As far as the east is from the west, God throws our sins away.

God invites us to dwell in a life of grace. Knowing that no score is being kept of wrong, rather constant invitations are being made to dwell in the peace that comes from reconciliation and love. Because if we do, then we are likely to live our lives as those who help others to reconcile and do what is loving and merciful.

Before we call out wrong in others, Jesus said, we need to call it out of ourselves. Remember his little saying about taking the log out of our own eye before trying to remove the stick from our neighbor's eye? It's easy to look at our family, our community, our church, our cities, our world, and call out wrong, and sometimes we should. But today I invite us to do a self-inventory first, so that we might find the freedom of grace and be empowered to live in love, not wearied by carrying around the burdens of guilt or frustration or secrets.

In the next few moments, I will lead us through a meditation in which I invite you to explore different parts of your life. I invite you to begin the process that many AA groups call a "searching and fearless inventory." Consider if you have wronged anyone or anything. Ask God for forgiveness and trust that it has already been offered and that you can live into that freedom. Then mark in your mind whatever this is so that

you can figure out later how to make it right, come to reconciliation, or do whatever is needful to let it go.

Now it's time to be honest with yourself. Get your body comfortable so your spirit can be made uncomfortable

Now consider if you have any conflict, division, unhealed hurts in any of these parts of your life:

Family

Work

Friends

Strangers (cars, stores, etc.)

Church

Neighbors

Earth

Here, amidst this great cloud of witnesses, people who sinned and who served just like us, people who now dwell in total grace, receive the grace of God. The late, great theologian Alexander Schmemmann once wrote that when we fully accept the grace of God, "life comes again to us as a gift, free and divine. Everything is free, nothing is due and yet all is given. And therefore, the greatest humility and obedience is to accept the gift, to say yes, in joy and in gratitude." (quoted in *Searching for Sunday*) Amen.