

St. Paul 2017 Faith Focus: The Small Catechism
Week 5: Confession and Forgiveness
Host guide

Warm Up

If there are new people, you can introduce yourself; then have each person in the group share:

- When you have done something wrong, whom do you tell? Pastor, friend, spouse, parent, friend, therapist? What about when you were younger

Teaching: Audio

These audio segments will be available online

Segment 1 of audio content (4 minutes): Confession in Small Catechism

- Lutherans typically do not practice individual confession as Luther describes in the Small Catechism
- Confession is linked to Baptism
- Confession is linked to Holy Communion

Some discussion questions:

- If Pastor Rob or another pastor offered personal confession, would you go to it? Do you think this could be a good thing for this church? Why or why not?
- What are times when you confess? What are ways in which you become more aware of your own sins?
- How important is the weekly act of confession in worship? What would make it more meaningful to you? Do you like using different words each week, each season, or generally keeping the name?
- Do you think a priest or pastor should legally be allowed to keep total confidentiality in confession?
- Have you ever thought of confession as related to Baptism?
- Do you ever use communion as a time of confessing your sins?

Segment 2 of audio content (3 minutes): Lutheran Worship and Confession and Forgiveness

- Earliest hymnals of St. Paul had austere confession practices
- Over time they become more “graceful”
- It was more about repentance than forgiveness

Some discussion questions:

- What do you think of the 1899 confession?
- If you grew up using one of the older more austere confession books, do you recall those words? Do you miss them?
- Do you think the “party of grace” has gone too far? Or not far enough? What has been gained with our current confession wording? What has been lost?

- Do you think the pastor should declare all sins forgiven, or put in a statement to the effect of “to those who believe...” or “to those who repent...” as the older hymnals did? (By the way, this is a big long debate in the Lutheran church).

Application: How to confess – from the Catechism

What is Confession?

Confession embraces two parts: the one is, that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the confessor, as from God Himself, and in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that our sins are thereby forgiven before God in heaven.

What sins should we confess?

Before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know, as we do in the Lord's Prayer. But before the confessor we should confess those sins alone which we know and feel in our hearts.

What should one confess?

Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee, co-worker; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, lazy; whether you have grieved any one by words or deeds; whether you have stolen, neglected, or wasted aught, or done other injury.

Some discussion questions:

- Luther encourages us to compare our life against 10 commandments (the what) in light of our vocations and relationships (the primary people and tasks to which we are called). Do you find this a helpful way to consider confession? Rather than ask how have I sinned, consider the commandments – how have I fallen short of them? Or perhaps more to the heart, consider the people in my life – how have I not fulfilled my obligations to them? How have I not loved them as I ought?
- What do you make of the request to confess even sins we do not know of? Can a person be guilty of something they did not know they did?
- Do you notice how Luther picks up lazy and disobedient as chief sins? (Can you see a Lutheran work ethic emerging!)

Prayer:

Luther emphasizes praying through the parts of the catechism. It is probably easiest to pray through Commandments or petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In light of the connection between Baptism and Confession, you may wish to consider praying through Baptism today.

+ Meditate -- Ask God what does your Baptism mean for you this day?

+ Thank -- Thank God for the way in which God has placed his name on you: Father, Son and Holy Spirit and has claimed you as your child.

+ Confess – Confess to God the parts of your life that need to be drowned and repented from.

+ Pray for binding – Ask God that you would be an instrument of God's will in this world.

Some groups are having success playing music while people pray or even pray in color. I have some possible audio clips on the website (YouTube videos).