

ROAD TO RECONCILIATION  
PRIDE SUNDAY  
A Sermon by Rev. Marci Glass  
June 26, 2022



**Leviticus 19:17-18**

17 “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 5:11-21**

The Ministry of Reconciliation

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13 If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14 For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:[a] The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

**Last week, we started a sermon series on Worship.** Victor started us off with the Sound of Praise. As Presbyterian-flavored Christians, we begin worship in prayer and song. Acknowledging God’s majesty and goodness, our response is to sing and say thanks.

And from there, we move to Confession, where we acknowledge that we sin, that we make mistakes, that we fall short of who we want to be.

In my years as pastor, I would say the complaint I've heard the most frequently is "why do we have to say a prayer of confession? It's so depressing. I don't like it".

And I can see where it might seem a weird move to go from adoration, and praise, and songs of joy to confession. But here's why it's genius. If we can honestly acknowledge God's awesome greatness, then we can honestly acknowledge that we are not, in fact God. And that there's a big gulf between God's omnipotent fabulousness and our... humanity.

It's not to say our humanity is bad.

Who invented penicillin, rocket ships, and sliced bread? HUMANITY!

But we're not God.

We didn't invent dogs, the Grand Canyon, or Whitney Houston's voice.

Some of you know I am a lapsed, amateur cellist. I can still make some beautiful music with my cello. But when I hear a recording of YoYo Ma, or Pablo Casals... I feel a need to confess to my sainted childhood cello teacher, Carol Graef, that I have not practiced and that I am not worthy.

The need for confession doesn't make me a terrible person. It just makes me a person. We all fall short. We all make mistakes. We all sometimes forget to practice our cello for 20 years. *It happens.*

If you meet someone who tells you they have never needed to confess because they've never ever done anything wrong, I would suggest to you that person is not being very honest about their own life, is not aware of their own behavior, and maybe has not learned that while they may have gifts, they are not, in fact, God.

We say a corporate prayer of confession, which means that we all speak the same words. We don't offer prayers of confession for what other people have done. Notice we've never once put "and Lord we hope Jimmy is confessing right now" in the bulletin.

We say corporate prayers of confession because there are times the words are too hard for us to say. And so the voices of our neighbors carry us along, supporting us when our voice falls silent. And there are weeks when your voice is clear and strong, carrying the prayer for someone else.

Weekly prayers of confession are also practice. It's a rehearsal for that time when we will need to voice an apology to someone for something we have done.

The weekly prayer of confession frees us to see our lives as they are, not as we think they should be. It frees us to observe ourselves and others with compassion and kindness.

And after the confession, we share in the Assurance of Pardon, where a liturgist leads us in voicing the reminder that our sins are forgiven. We don't have to carry the weight of our mistakes forever. Confession, forgiveness, pardon. It's a process by which we set down the weight of our mistakes and seek to be better, to do better.

The gift of confession (and then of forgiveness and pardon) is that we don't have to pretend the past never happened. It frees us for a different future.

I love the writings of the apostle Paul. I don't always like how Christians use his writings, but I can't control that. I will say that when you hear Paul used to defend strict legalism, or to keep God's grace from people, to keep people out, that his writings are being misused. Because Paul, again and again, seeks to build up the Body of Christ. And seeks to do so by including more and more people into the Body.

And, of course, Paul wasn't really writing for us. He didn't know we'd be studying his letters 2,000 years after they were written. He certainly had no idea he was writing Scripture. To Paul, Scripture was the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Paul was writing letters to actual people. To congregations he either had started or was going to be visiting. He was writing to address specific issues in the lives of these churches.

Corinth was a Roman colony and an important port city on a trade route. Paul is writing to people in an urban setting, with many different religions and gods with which the people would have been familiar. He was writing to people like us.

The "church" in Corinth during the time Paul was writing to them, would have met in homes, and not in separate church buildings, as we do today. He founded the church around 51 CE.

In the passage Joann read, Paul is still working to establish authority with the Corinthians. There are lots of people seeking their time and allegiance, but Paul's authority is grounded in God.

"Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences."

Paul recognizes that human relationships are faulty, because humans, and that the best chance for our reconciliation is to ground our relationships in Jesus.

"From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup>that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself..."

Ultimately, reconciliation is the goal for our confession, forgiveness, and pardon. Seeking pardon for a behavior you're uninterested in changing will not restore relationships or bring about reconciliation. 'Thoughts and prayers' won't lead to change unless one of the prayers offered is one of confession.

I don't need to spell out in too much detail how we're living in fractious times. But we can't just wait for our political opponents to start confessing their sins if we want God's new creation to come about.

I have opinions about what some elected and appointed officials need to confess right now. But what I can do is confess my own part in the mess of the world.

As Paul writes: For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

There is a line from a Prayer of Confession that always sticks with me. It comes from Paul's letter to the church in Rome. "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done".

**We have left undone those things we ought to have done.**

There are many places today in our world that we can pray that prayer. The scourge of gun violence continues, and I confess I doubt the bill passed this week by congress will fix things. I hope I'm proven wrong.

We have not protected our schools, our churches, our public spaces, or our homes from gun violence.

**We have left undone those things we ought to have done.** *Lord, hear our prayer and equip us for the work still to be done.*

I still don't know exactly what to say about Friday's Supreme Court ruling, ending constitutional protections for abortion. Many of you know my story. When I was facing an unplanned (by me) pregnancy in college, I was able to make the choice that was best for me at the time. I placed my son for adoption and he will turn 33 years old on Tuesday. And I'm thankful for him each and every day of my life because I had the choice. Had it not been my choice, had the state forced me to do something I did not want to do, my life would have been very different.

We cannot force people to bear children against their will, especially when we refuse to provide support for those children once they are born. This ruling will disproportionately harm Black, Latino, and indigenous communities.

I serve on Planned Parenthood's Clergy Advocacy Board, and here's a portion of the statement we released this week:

"As people of faith and deep moral conviction, we unequivocally oppose bans and restrictions on abortion. Any proposed restrictions undermine individual moral agency and the ability to make personal health decisions according to one's conscience, including whether and when to parent. We affirm the moral agency and divine, religious right of people seeking abortions, their bodily autonomy, and their moral authority to make reproductive decisions that express what abundance means for them."<sup>1</sup>

I confess my complicity in a system that has allowed this terrible decision to be announced. I apologize to the generations of people before me who worked so hard to obtain those rights that are now slipping away. I will stay in this work even when despair threatens to overtake me because I want children to be born in love and not into trauma and pain.

**We have left undone those things we ought to have done.** *Lord, hear our prayer and equip us for the work still to be done.*

Today is PRIDE Sunday, and after worship, I'm looking forward to marching with other Bay Area faith communities in the parade and hope you'll join us.

Many years ago, when I was first serving my congregation in Boise, I shared a video of a woman named Kathy Baldock who would go to PRIDE in San Francisco wearing a shirt that read "hurt by the church? Get a straight apology here". And she would walk through the festival and apologize to the people she met, saying she was sorry they received harm and not love in church.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/newsroom/press-releases/planned-parenhoods-clergy-advocacy-board-speaks-out-against-scotus-decision-to-overturn-roe?fbclid=IwAR338spTE6uhiKM6i2Seowa93sowIKT8ffqUCnJUiJircTktpWOqzByryZI>

A member of the church asked me if we could do that at Boise PRIDE. And so, they took that proposal to the mission committee. At first people voiced all their questions. And then they voiced their fears. And then Cathie Walker, who was 93 years old, one of the first women ordained as an elder in that congregation many years before, spoke. "It seems the question to me is 'where would Jesus be if he were here today?' And I think he'd be at PRIDE, offering love and welcome to his children who'd been excluded."

After her words, the mission committee, and then the session, voted enthusiastically, maybe even unanimously, to go to PRIDE. And we'd walk around and offer apology to people who had been hurt by religion.

People will routinely say to me, when I'd ask if they'd been hurt by the church, "well, your church wasn't the one that hurt me".

"But I bet some church, somewhere, did. And I'm sorry. You deserved love and acceptance and family, and you didn't get it. I'm sorry."

It is some of the most sacred work I've been privileged to be a part of.

And it is fitting that on PRIDE Sunday, we talk about reconciliation. We can hang our rainbow banners in the sanctuary and the PRIDE flag outside the building. And those are good and important things to do.

But we can't stop there.

**We have left undone those things we ought to have done.**

My friend Slats Toole serves on the Board of the Covenant Network with me, and they have written this prayer. It's called "The Confession I long to hear".

it is so hard to say,  
"we were wrong."  
it is only here, in the intimacy of prayer  
with a God who became vulnerable to us  
that we can dare to whisper in Your ear:  
"we thought we were being kind.

we thought we were being good,  
and righteous  
and following Your word.

we thought we were saving souls."

God of mercy, now we know:  
judgement and salvation are your task,  
not ours.  
return us to Your call to care and serve all Your children,

may we never again call profane  
those who you have made beloved.  
amen

Before I head off to the PRIDE parade to offer a straight apology, let me start here. If you're a member the LGBTQIA+ community, thank you for being here. Thank you for sticking it out with religion, when I know it has not been easy. I see you and I love you. And I am thankful for the gifts God has given you. And I'm sorry. I'm sorry you received pain and rejection from people in the name of the God of love. You deserved better from God's people. And I'm sorry.

**We have left undone those things we ought to have done.** *Lord, hear our prayer and equip us for the work still to be done.*

Friends, the path to reconciliation is not easy. But it is the path God has given us to walk. "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." I am thankful to be on this journey with you, as we seek to be faithful to the God of Love who is reconciling all things to himself. Amen.