

Sunday, August 15, 2021

May I come into your Hall Closet?

(Message 9; Series: *My Heart, Christ's Home*)

(Luke 19:1-10)

Scripture:

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ²A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. ⁴So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

⁵When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

⁷All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

⁹Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Message:

Our society appears to have mastered the art of the euphemisms. We're especially good at making unpleasant truth and reality sound better.

Companies no longer *fire* people (that's too negative); they "right size" or "let them go." People aren't "bald," they are "follicly challenged" or "comb free." It's not "roadkill," it is "vehicularly compressed maladaptive life forms."

A funeral home made a list of euphemisms for their employees to use: Don't say "corpse," say "loved one;" not "cemetery" but "memorial park;" not "digging a grave," but "opening an internment site;" not a "death certificate," but "vital information card."

Restaurants now offer "call ahead seating" (apparently, *reservation* sounded too bureaucratic).

Some years ago, you could buy a *used car*; now you buy a *pre-owned automobile* (meaning someone else has gone through all the trouble of

breaking it in just for you); you can also purchase a “*certified pre-owned automobile*” (in case you suspect that it wasn’t actually pre-owned).

Some years ago, a White House press secretary (Ron Ziegler) made a statement that subsequently proved completely false. When questioned about it the next day, he responded “*Yes, you’re right, that statement is no longer operative.*” (Ever tried that at work? School? Home?)

Today, people are willing to distort (twist) truth so they can spare themselves some unpleasantness. Sadly, that tendency resonates even stronger in people’s spiritual lives.

“Sin” is seldom in our vocabulary anymore; we find other words to describe it; for example, a short-coming, error, slip-up, blunder, foible, misstep, hiccup, or growth area.

Cornelius Plantinga, in *Not the Way It’s Suppose to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, writes, “*The awareness of sin used to be our shadow. Christians hated sin—feared it, fled from it, grieved over it. A man who lost his temper might wonder whether he could still go to communion. A woman who for years envied her more attractive and intelligent sister might worry that this sin threatened her soul. In today’s group confessionals, it’s harder to tell. Our newer language fudges.*”

This morning, in our study of *My Heart; Christ’s Home* we’re standing in front of the **hall closet – our last room. Closets are for hiding things we don’t want other people to see.**

When Jesus knocks on the door of our heart, he asks for permission to come into every room, into every part of our heart and life - not just the parts we want to share with him.

One day, Jesus says, “*There’s something that doesn’t smell quite right in this house. It’s in that closet. It smells like something is rotting and it needs to go.*”

Munger says that made him mad: “*Jesus, I have given you full access to the rest of the house. I just have a couple old habits and attitudes and I need them; I want them. I don’t want you to change them.*” Jesus says, “*Then I can’t stay in your house.*”

The Hall Closet is often the **hardest** room—and usually the **last room**—we give to Jesus because it is the room that contains the things we really don’t want God to see or know about; the things we prefer would remain hidden.

When Jesus came and preached the Kingdom of God, there was one word he often used. Listen carefully:

“*In those days, John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying “**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 3:1-2)*

“From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matthew 4:17)

“After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” (Mark 1:14-15).

It was the message that dominated Jesus’ life and ministry. Then Jesus left to return to his Father, and he sent his Spirit. The Spirit also arrived with a message. Listen to these words of Peter on Pentecost – the day the Spirit arrived:

“When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart (i.e., their closet door was opened up) and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:37-38)

The primary response to Jesus’ coming (i.e., his Kingdom coming) is to repent. Contrary to popular opinion, repenting is not something that you do once and then you’re done forever. Repentance is the way of life in God’s Kingdom. Repentance is the path to deepening our relationship with the Father.

In the Church, we know people who are good at witnessing, giving, worship, teaching, or serving. Does anyone know someone who is an expert at repentance? Do we even know of someone who wants to be?

The question before us this morning is, “How do we turn our Hall Closets over to Jesus?” That is, how do we go about repenting?

NAMING OUR SIN

Repenting isn’t excusing, rationalizing, or blaming someone else for our sin. Those are all things sin naturally inclines us to do. Just watch the news some night – everyone does it. No one takes responsibility when they mess up anymore.

That is what sin does. Remember when Adam had eaten the forbidden fruit and God asked: “Adam, why are you hiding? Did you eat from the tree that I told you not to?” Adam reflects on the importance of taking personal responsibility for his action, summons all of his courage up and says, “It was the woman **You** gave me.” “She wasn’t my idea.” Adam won’t say, “I did it” - even though he did. He has the audacity to blame God. That is what sin does. Sin and hiding are like two sides of the same coin – they go together. But the results are always disastrous. Listen to the Psalmist:

Psalm 32:3-5 – *“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away...your hand was heavy on me. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”*

Repentance needs to happen **one sin at a time.** Marilyn does the laundry at our house and for good reason! If it was me, I’d maximize efficiency. I’d wait for a huge pile and squeeze it into the machine with a plunger. You know the result. Everything would look the same color: dingy. To get clean, clothes need to be washed in smaller piles.

We live in a world where people take their dirty laundry more seriously than they do their stained souls. People will take more time and energy to get their clothes clean than they will to get their hearts and lives purified.

We tend to throw all our sins into one big pile and say, *“God, please forgive all my sins.”* And it is even easier, when we do it corporately, *“Father, forgive all our – mostly their – sins.”* It’s much less embarrassing, much less painful, and much less helpful. Meanwhile, we tend not to take sin very seriously and hiding it makes it easier to ignore. (Truth is, God loves to forgive our sin if we just bring it out in the open, confess it to him, and ask him to forgive us).

But repentance is not just a bookkeeping detail - one “I’m sorry” for every sin we’ve committed. Repentance is about a relationship. It’s about character transformation. It is about becoming more and more like Jesus. If I just do the *“Here’s my pile, God, forgive and clean them all up,”* we miss out on much of the cleansing and healing power of God’s grace – and it leaves us dingy.

Repentance requires getting **painfully honest with God (and sometimes painfully honest with others).**

“God, I said I was late for a meeting because traffic was bad. Really, I didn’t give myself enough time to get there. I told a lie. I am a liar. God, please forgive me.”

“God, the reason I lied is I wanted them to think better of me than what is really true. I’m living an image rather than a reality. I’m a little hollow inside. Please forgive me.”

“God, the reason I complain so much is because I think it should be done my way because I think my way and perspective is better. Father, I know that’s pride and I need to be more encouraging and supportive. Please forgive me.”

In repentance, it’s good to ask, “Why** did I sin? **What’s** the reason?”** Sin is often an illegitimate way of trying to meet a legitimate need. Part of the healing process is to identify the legitimate need (like the need to be loved or belong) and find a God-honoring way to meet it; otherwise, we will keep falling into the same sin trap over and over and over again.

In repentance, it's also good to ask, "What's the result of my having sinned in that way? What damage did I do? How has it **impacted others?"**

Sin always impacts more people than just the sinner. When we start to realize the impact our sin has, it can help us become more Christ-like. For example, we want to be valued so slander or devalue someone else and feel a self-righteous superiority. But our slander damages the other's reputation and good name. When I gossip, I damage the community.

John Ortberg tells of preaching one time on sin. Harry came up afterwards, *"John, I don't like those kinds of messages. All this talk about sin just makes me feel bad. Besides, I don't consider myself a sinner."*

John said, "Let me ask you a few questions, Harry. Have you always been faithful to your wife?" "Well, you know, John, I'm in sales." (John knew what that meant).

"When you fill out your expense account, have you ever added something that wasn't strictly business?" "Yah, everyone does that."

"When you're selling, have you ever exaggerated your products' value? Have you ever promised an unrealistic shipping date?" "Of course, that's just standard in the industry."

John said, *"Harry, you have just told me you are an adulterer, a cheater and a liar. Repeat after me. I'm an adulterer, a cheater and a liar."*

We need to say it like it is: "We're adulterers, cheaters, liars, thieves, gossipers, slanderers and we are all desperately in need of a Savior. And until this truth is brought to light in each of our lives, we can't experience God's forgiveness and healing grace.

SEEKING HIS HELP

Sometimes we don't know what to confess so we **ask God to point out our sin. I've told this story before, but it bears repeating:**

Charles Steinmetz, with General Electric, was a legend in engineering in early 1900s. Even after he retired, they call him to fix problems no one else could. When a big machine broke down and no one could figure it out, they called Stienmetz. He walked around for ten minutes, took out a piece of chalk and placed a "X" on one part of the machine. The engineers took that part out and fixed it.

They got a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000! (Lot of money in early 1900s). They wrote back requesting an itemized bill. It came a few days later: Line 1: Making one cross mark \$1.00. Line 2: Knowing where to put it \$9,999.00. (That's critical!)

The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that “*The heart [meaning, our heart] is deceitful above all things...*” (**Jeremiah 17:9**).

We might watch a commercial for World Vision and our heart is stirred; we think we’re compassionate. The next commercial comes on and now all we think about is how much we need that new car; that sundae, Blizzard or Concrete Mixer; that medication; those clothes and the attractiveness and success they offer.

One minute our heart can be filled with worship, and we think we’re devout and satisfied with how much we love God; then the next song we think “*I can’t stand this song; we sing this ditty all the time; the guitar is too loud; the vocalists never smile...*”

Sin is not just a **specific act**. It is also this **brokenness** inside our heart that leaks out all the time. We can’t make it stop; We can’t even slow it down. That is the human condition.

The **Psalmist (19:12)** asks, “*Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults.*” Begin by asking God where to put the “X.” He knows! We need to ask God for help.

Then ask God for a change in your **attitude about that sin that has you trapped.**

“Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” (**James 4:8-10**).

God isn’t saying we need to beg and **grovel** before He’ll forgive us. He is saying that part of repentance is changing our attitude and emotions about our greed, lust, gossip, pride and self-centeredness.

He wants us to see sin as he sees sin; to feel about sin as he feels about sin; to see sin for the rotten and messed up junk sin is so we don’t want to do it anymore; to see the devastating consequences of sin as he sees the consequences of our sin.

There is a **godly sorrow** that leads to repentance—that’s good and restorative—and a worldly sorrow that leads to death (I got caught!).

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.” (**2 Corinthians 7:10**)

Psychologists say everyone is either neurotic or has a personality disorder. Everyone leans at least a bit one way or the other: If you’re neurotic, you think every thing is your fault even if it is not. You blame yourself for being depressed, for the bad weather, road construction, inflation, the Lion’s losing

streak (although so far this season they haven't lost). You feel guilty all the time. You need to lean into God's grace or confession will simply be beating yourself up more.

If you have a personality disorder, you externalize blame. You don't feel guilty even when you should. It is always someone else's fault. When confessing, you need someone to speak truth. God's Spirit will speak truth – if you listen. So will a good friend. Never owning up to our sin simply leads to death.

MAKING AMENDS

There is a major difference between **genuine repentance or doing **damage control**.** (We've been watching New York's governor trying to do damage control over the past few weeks; it never works). **Only Jesus can cure our reason to hide.**

You know the story of Zacchaeus (Scott Hoezee preached on it two weeks ago). Zacchaeus was considered immoral by his fellow Jews. There were three occupations considered immoral: gambler, usurer (someone who lends money at exorbitant rates), and tax collector (tax collector was the worst). Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector.

In **Luke 19:6-7**, we read, *"When Jesus reached the spot (under the tree where Zacchaeus was hiding), he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly."* Jesus calls Zacchaeus out of his hiding place.

Zacchaeus came down. Jesus was coming to his house. But when people realized what Jesus was doing, they began to mutter, "He is going to be the guest of a sinner." That was no news to Zacchaeus. He knew he was morally ragged. One of the keys to coming out of hiding is to admit that – to get it out in the open and have Jesus deal with it.

Jesus called him out, but Zacchaeus hears good news from Jesus and responds well. Listen:

"Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

(Luke 19:8)

Real repentance includes a sincere intent to change into a different person.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S GRACE

Genuine repentance always leads us to experience **God's grace.** Jesus loves it when someone hands him the **keys** to their **hall closet**. Maybe you can do that today.

Jesus is the greatest forgiver, transformer, and grace dispenser the world has ever known. He is never shocked. He has never turned anybody away who has come to him genuinely repentant.

Grace is kind of God's specialty. That's why He went to the **cross**. Repentance is never complete until we've walked to the cross and heard Christ's word of sacrificial love.

In His love and grace, he creates a community where people can finally be open and honest, confess and be real so no one is held hostage to the Hall Closet anymore; a **community** where people are so aware of their own brokenness and so overwhelmed by God's grace that there isn't any room for people judging someone else's Hall closet. The Scripture calls this community, "**Church.**"

Listen to this poem (unfortunately, I don't know its author)

*"I was shocked, confused and bewildered as I entered Heaven's door,
Not by the beauty of it all, by the lights or its décor
But it was the folks in Heaven that made me sputter and gasp
The thieves, the liars, sinners, alcoholics, and the trash.
There stood the kid from seventh grade who swiped my lunch money twice.
Next to him was my old neighbor who never said anything nice.
Herb, who I always thought was rotting away in Hell
Was sitting pretty on Cloud Nine looking incredibly well.
I nudged Jesus, What's the deal? I'd like to hear your take.
How did all these sinners get up here? God must have made a mistake.
And, why is everyone so quiet and somber? Give me a clue.
Hush child, He said, they are all in shock, no one thought they would see you.*

The deep truth of this poem is we all have an odor coming from our hall closet. Fact is, I know more about my hall closet than I do anyone else's; the most shocking person I know who will end up in heaven...is me. Euphemisms or no euphemisms, we all have to deal with our hall closets. We'll provide you with an opportunity to do that...right now...

Repentance is the death that leads to life (Piano playing softly).

Let's talk to Jesus: *"Jesus, my Hall Closet is a mess, and it scares me because I can't fix it. I've tried. Now I can no longer stand the stench. Jesus, will you help me, come into my closet, and clean house..."*

(Maybe you've never asked God to forgive you for anything. This is a great time to start...

(Maybe you talk to Him regularly...but there's still some junk in your hall closet you haven't dealt with, or stuff that is troubling you. This is a good time to come clean...

(We need to stop pretending; to name what is in there: pride, anger, bitterness, materialism, lust, envy, self-righteousness, greed... and then hand Him the keys and he will open the door. Talk to Him now...)

silent reflection

Now, Heavenly Father, in these few moments I have laid my sin before You. I name it for what it is. I have betrayed myself, offended others, and dishonored you. Now, I ask you to forgive me for Jesus' sake. Cleanse me and make me (and my closet) clean.

Thank You. I am overwhelmed by the grace that you purchased at the price of the cross. I am so grateful for the good news of Your presence and love for me and I want my life to be life of repentance and joy. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Jesus loves when His people **humble themselves and **repent** before Him.**

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His steadfast love towards those who fear Him. As far as the East is from the West, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. And as a father has compassion for his children, so the Lord has compassion for those who fear Him. (Psalm 103-8-13)

Jesus just loves to **clean** our closets. It makes his Father's heart **glad**. It makes our hearts **pure** so Jesus can move in, take up residence, and stay...

Prayer: (singing): Into My Heart

Dr. Douglas Kamstra
Covenant CRC
7171 Willard Ave. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49548
(616) 455-5120 | info@covenant-crc.org