Today is the first Sunday in Lent. Let me briefly explain a bit of what that means. We had a very meaningful Ash Wednesday service to begin our forty-day Lenten journey. In advance of Easter, Lent serves as a time of preparation and increased awareness of the suffering and victory of Jesus. For Lent, we look again at the price paid for our sin and at the cost of our redemption. And in Lent we see again the intimacy and lovingkindness of our Heavenly Father. It is a time of increased awareness and preparation during which we recognize that the capacity to resist temptation or even to repent doesn’t come from our own strength or initiative. This capacity comes from our Heavenly Father, our relationship with Him, and the grace of His deliverance (\*Hebrews 4:14-16 ). This is not about legalism or “rule keeping.” It is about relationship, renewal, and spiritual cleansing.

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\* Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven,[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. 16 Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Family, it is important to understand two things before we move forward: 1) the necessity of forgiveness, and 2) God’s nature (\* Psalm 103:1-14). In Psalm 32, we read a personal testimony of David experiencing joy of forgiveness. Most scholars believe that David wrote Psalm 32 after writing Psalm 51, each recognized as one of seven psalms of confession. The context for them is his sin with Bathsheba and the confrontation with Nathan. If you will remember, David has an illicit affair with Bathsheba and arranges to have her husband killed. After these events, Nathan calls out David, as 2 Samuel records. David writes of his request for forgiveness in Psalm 51 and reflects upon the

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\*Psalm 103:1-14

1 Praise the Lord, my soul;

all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

2 Praise the Lord, my soul,

and forget not all his benefits—

3 who forgives all your sins

and heals all your diseases,

4 who redeems your life from the pit

and crowns you with love and compassion,

5 who satisfies your desires with good things

so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

6 The Lord works righteousness

and justice for all the oppressed.

7 He made known his ways to Moses,

his deeds to the people of Israel:

8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious,

slow to anger, abounding in love.

9 He will not always accuse,

nor will he harbor his anger forever;

10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve

or repay us according to our iniquities.

11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so great is his love for those who fear him;

12 as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion on his children,

so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;

14 for he knows how we are formed,

he remembers that we are dust.

joy of having received forgiveness. In Psalm 51, we hear David’s misery, his contriteness, his hope for forgiveness. In Psalm 32, we hear David express his blessed joy (see Psalm 32:1-5 below). David doesn’t just hate where his sin has taken him, but he also misses where he was (in a healthy relationship with His God) before he committed the sin. David makes no excuse for his sin. He owns it. Then, he asks for forgiveness and commits to walking in the life of forgiveness. Solomon later writes in Proverbs 28:13, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” This truth begs the question: Why do we hesitate to go before our merciful God to receive forgiveness?

Look at the cross for two things this morning: How seriously God takes our sin but also how far He will go to assure us our pardon. However, with regard to sin, we tend to cover up. But as deep as our faults go, forgiveness goes deeper. We miss out on joy by failing to recognize, repent, release, and realize: Recognize our sin, repent of our sin, release it and our guilt to Christ, and realize (and appreciate) the joy of being cleansed. In Psalm 32:5, David writes, “5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you

and did not cover up my iniquity.” Well, you may say, Pastor Chris, you don’t know what I’ve done! That is true, but Jesus does, and He stands ready to forgive you. His mercy is more. His grace is greater. Don’t let fear, pride, shame, or self-deceit keep you from being forgiven, cleansed, and set free. The same God who forgives David stands ready to forgive each of us. All too often, we carry the burden of guilt while the blessing and joy of forgiveness is available. In Psalm 51:10-12, David gives us a familiar and important example: “Create in me a clean heart, Oh God! And renew a right spirit within me . . . restore to me the joy of your salvation.” What a prayer!!

So, who among us needs forgiveness? In Romans 3:23, Paul says we all do: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We can experience joy and blessings in forgiveness when we have peace with God through Christ and His sacrifice (\*1Peter 3:18 and \*\*1John 1:8-10). Christ is faithful. And, family, today is a wonderful day to

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\*1Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

\*\*1John 1:8-10

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

start fresh with the Lord. We do this by clinging to the Gospel, by being gripped by grace. When we conceal our sin, guilt imprisons us. When we confess our sin, grace frees us. This is David’s realization. Maybe you need to come to Christ for the first time for salvation (\*Romans 10:9-11). In Christ, we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of His grace. Family, you can almost hear the God of Grace knocking at the door. God is ready to forgive when we call upon Him with a contrite heart. In Psalm 32, David assures us that

1Blessed is the one

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord does not count against them

and in whose spirit is no deceit.

We reap the blessings of forgiveness and trust in the Lord, and we experience the joy of being forgiven—the utter JOY of His salvation. This salvation frees us from guilt. Two thousand years ago, Jesus Himself, hung on a crude, cruel cross, paid the penalty for our sins and made forgiveness possible. That’s how love you and I are. As Paul affirms, God demonstrates His love for us in this: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). How will you respond? See the difference in David. Like him, rejoice in forgiveness. Confess. Repent. Receive the joy—Psalm 32:11 “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!” Walk in the joy! Live in the joy! Be transformed in it!

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\*Romans 10:9-11

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”[a]

Passages in support of this sermon:

Psalm 51

1 Have mercy on me, O God,

according to your unfailing love;

according to your great compassion

blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash away all my iniquity

and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,

and my sin is always before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned

and done what is evil in your sight;

so you are right in your verdict

and justified when you judge.

5 Surely I was sinful at birth,

sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;

you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;

wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;

let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins

and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,

and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me from your presence

or take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation

and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,

so that sinners will turn back to you.

Psalm 32

1 Blessed is the one

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

2 Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord does not count against them

and in whose spirit is no deceit.

3 When I kept silent,

my bones wasted away

through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night

your hand was heavy on me;

my strength was sapped

as in the heat of summer.[b]

5 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.

6 Therefore let all the faithful pray to you

while you may be found;

surely the rising of the mighty waters

will not reach them.

7 You are my hiding place;

you will protect me from trouble

and surround me with songs of deliverance.

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

9 Do not be like the horse or the mule,

which have no understanding

but must be controlled by bit and bridle

or they will not come to you.

10 Many are the woes of the wicked,

but the Lord’s unfailing love

surrounds the one who trusts in him.

11 Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous;

sing, all you who are upright in heart!