

Have you ever wondered why we start our worship with confession and forgiveness? I have never really thought about it outside of recognizing that this is the only church that I have served that has the confession and forgiveness first. Normally, we begin worship with confession and forgiveness. In the other two churches that I have served, we began worship with the processional hymn and then had the confession and forgiveness.

To be honest with you, I don't know if it really matters where the confession and forgiveness falls in the worship service as long as we do it. This is central to the Lutheran faith because when we repent and ask God to forgive us, then that forgiveness is granted.

Martin Luther felt that this forgiveness was a great gift to us from God and since it was a gift, it was free. That thought or idea went against the church practices at the time because they were selling indulgences for forgiveness. Back then if you wanted to be forgiven by God, then you had to pay for it.

Martin argued against the church that if God granted forgiveness to those who repented and asked, then how could the church charge for that. Forgiveness is a gift for all people by God. Nothing is said about paying for that forgiveness or even earning that forgiveness. God is able to forgive each one of us as we live in HIS grace.

That is great in itself but the best part of God's forgiveness is that once it is granted, then he forgets about our sin. For God, forgiveness equals forgetting and not holding our sins against us.

That really is the difference between the forgiveness that God grants and the forgiveness that we grant. I will be the first to admit that I am able to forgive you if you sin against me, but the next time we are in a similar situation, I may not be as trusting. When somebody wrongs us, we remember that pain. It is only natural.

But we still work hard to forgive and not let our feelings control our future actions. Since we live in God's forgiveness we try to share that same forgiveness. As we share this forgiveness, we do so by forgiving others and by telling others about God's forgiveness.

In our gospel for this morning, Jesus once again appeared and stood among the disciples and opened their minds to the scripture so that they were able to understand what had taken place. And then Jesus told them that repentance and forgiveness in his name was to be proclaimed to all nations beginning with Jerusalem.

Since that day, disciples of all time have proclaimed that very message. We live in God's forgiveness and we share that forgiveness as we invite others to join us in worshipping God.

It is this gift of forgiveness that helps us to live with one another. It helps us to let go of the differences that we have and the pain that we have experienced so that we can be like Christ to those we meet.