

9 PENTECOST  
JULY 16/17, 2016

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Psalm 25:1-12; Isaiah 58:9b-14; Luke 19:1-10  
*Atonement = At-one-ment*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*



Life has been called a **parade** – which is true in some ways...and at various **times** and in certain **settings** we're either **in** it or **sitting** and **watching** it go **by**. Some are **grand**, like the New Year's Day **Rose** Parade or Macy's **Thanksgiving** Day Parade.

Still others are **littler** and **local**. **Here's** a picture of the parade we were at on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July up in Crosby, Minnesota, where my brother-in-law's family lives.



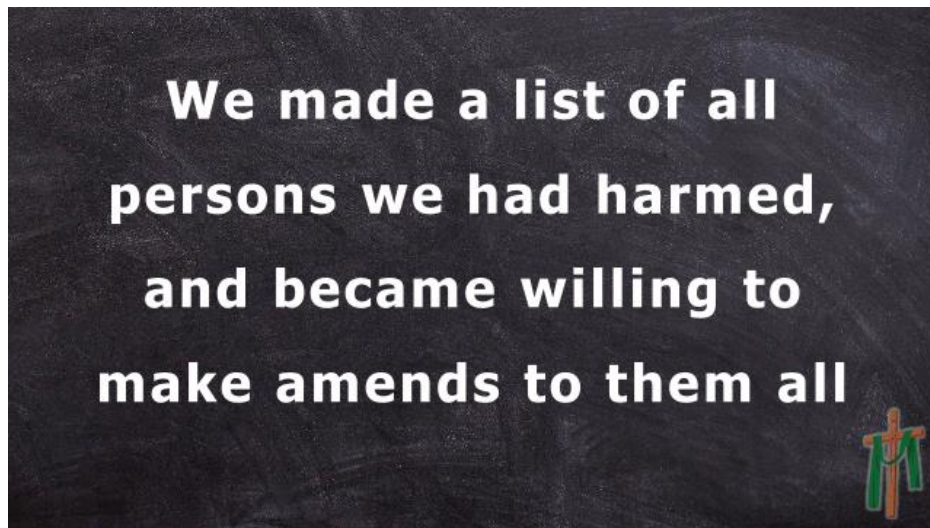
But whether **magnificent** or modest, **sumptuous** or simple, **fantastic** or merely fine, these parades share some characteristics.

- They are **public**
- They usually commemorate a **celebration**
- There's a host of **anonymous** faces
- Lots of **smiles**
- and plenty of happy **music, applause, candy and flowers or flags...**

But **now** I want you to envision a **different** kind of parade. It is not a **happy** procession...it is a **display**, in fact, that is the **polar opposite** of the pictures we've just seen.

- Instead of a public experience, this parade is *intensely private* – occurring **only** in the recesses of our **memories**, and usually starts its march during those **sleepless** times on *restless nights...*

- This parade is *no* celebration, but instead a troubling tribulation
- Every **face** we see is either **well-known** or **well-remembered**
- In the place of smiles and laughter, we see **tears/frowns/angry looks**
- Neither is there music to be heard – only the *harsh sound* of heated words or cutting comments, *or* the cold empty echo of *betrayal, selfishness, self-centeredness, sin...*



Step 8 says that *We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all*

This painful exercise – and I assure you, it's as painful for me, as it is for you – this **painful parade** of **faces** and **names** can **only** be even attempted when we have a **goal** in mind, a **place** to find **peace**, a **solid rock** of **forgiveness** upon which we can stand...so *hold on to those shells!*

They are a *great symbol* of the gift of **baptism**: God's **unceasing promise** to forgive, a promise which we can trust to remain **solid** and **secure** in spite of the storms that swirl around us... even storms of our own creation...

Steps 8 & 9 are about *making amends* to people we've hurt – first naming them, and then making amends to those we can. That's why I call it a painful parade – there's an **ache** in our hearts, in our spirits, in our souls when we recall the people that we've hurt: directly, indirectly, or as collateral damage when we sought to hurt someone else.

There are some things that I've done in my life that I'm not proud of, to say the least – and I'm guessing that the same is true for most, if not all, of you. Now, as time goes on, we like to pretend that we've left those unpleasant memories behind us. But the fact is that they're there, their names and faces can lie dormant for ages, then suddenly swirl through our thoughts and dreams (or nightmares!).

**Some** of mine I can approach and apologize to – and they'd get it. **Others**, I'm sure, would think that I was making a **mountain** out of a **molehill**. A **couple**, I'm afraid, would prefer that I **keep** my **apology** to **myself** and just *stay away*.

**We made direct amends  
to such people wherever  
possible, except when to  
do so would injure them  
or others**



But here's the wisdom of the 9th step – we're called to apologize to those we've hurt, if, in doing so, it won't add to their troubles in life. So, though it's not always easy for us to apologize and ask someone's forgiveness, there is at the same time an incredible gift of beauty, freedom and power in that potentially challenging experience.

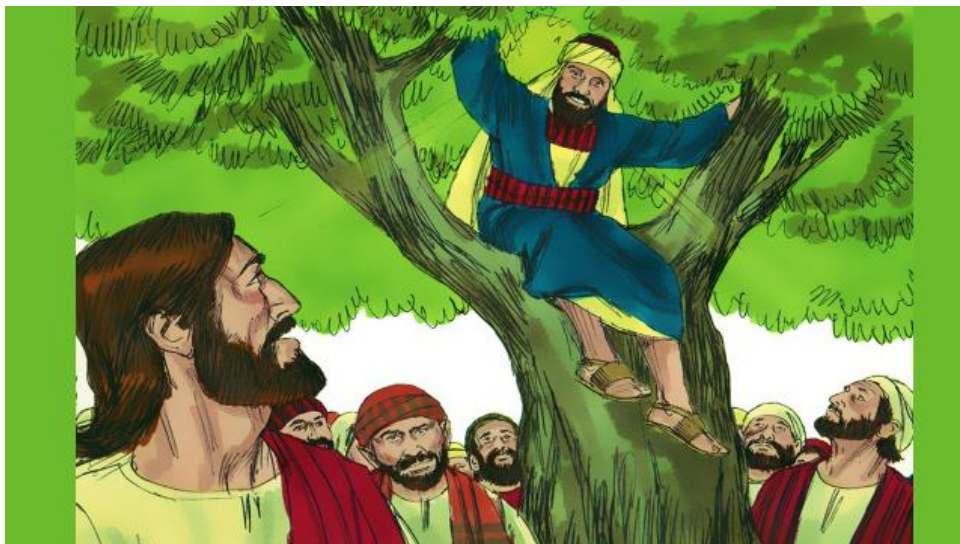
**Q: What is the blessing for us in apologizing and making amends to people we've hurt? What good can come from it?**

- Possibly repairs a relationship
- Removes negative energy from that person's bad memories
- Removes the burden of guilt and shame from our own hearts
- Takes those people out of the painful parade in our memories

Now, there will always be people we can't apologize to personally – for whatever reason. If that's the case, here's a suggestion I heard. Rather than leaving such folks in the limbo of our memories, doomed to march in our nightmare-ish parades of pain, we're encouraged to DO something for **someone else**, or to MAKE a **sacrificial gift** of some kind with that person in mind, or in that person's honor.

**Q: Does all this make sense or does it sound like so much psycho-babble?**

It always helps in the end, I believe, to bring our thoughts and ideas to the corrective of the Bible. And at this point, we have the delightful story of Zacchaeus to help us wrap things up.



You remember the story: Jesus is walking through Jericho – and, as usual, he’s being treated like a rock star – crowds of people are surrounding him – amazed at the things he says, the miracles he does, the spirit of life that he exudes.

Zacchaeus is chief tax collector for the Romans, which means two things: #1 he’s VERY rich and #2 he’s VERY unpopular with his fellow Jews because he takes their money. He’s short in stature, but he’s also short of friends, and short of any show of mercy or concern from the whole town.

And yet...there’s something about this Jesus fellow that drives Zacchaeus to great lengths just to see the man. The crowd can’t (or won’t) let him get close, so he finally sheds his last scrap of self-esteem and resorts to the childish trick of climbing a tree to get a good look at something.

And then it happens – Jesus stops right below him, looks up at the man and urges him to climb down quickly, saying, *I must stay at your house today!*

It's an idea that is **abhorrent** to any good, faithful Jew, for they all know that the chief tax collector is also the chief sinner – by definition. Yet Jesus doesn't seem to **care** – or **cares** about something far more **important** than people's opinions of this person's imperfections.

And here's the power of Jesus' unqualified acceptance of Zacchaeus. The guy is so moved by the encounter that he promises to give half of what he owns to the poor, and then to repay 4 times the amount if he cheats anybody.

Isn't he the **picture** of living in **God's gift of forgiveness**? He's truly **free** – spiritually, emotionally, relationally – and that's the promise waiting for **us** when we embrace this call to apologize to the people we've hurt, and to make amends where we can.

**We continued to take  
personal inventory and  
when we were wrong,  
promptly admitted it**



Finally, we're also called to embrace the wisdom of step 10: let's read it together...

The thing to remember about **taking inventory** is that, yes, we have to be **honest** about our defects, bad habits and questionable qualities. But at the **same** time, we're **also** called to *lift up*, *celebrate*, and draw **strength** from all the **good** qualities with which we have been so abundantly blessed by God.



So here's the gift, the joy, the beauty of the 10<sup>th</sup> step: if we're following the previous nine – then the inventory we continually take of our lives will, over the long haul, become a story that's *far less* about a painful parade of the people we've upset, and **more** a **proud parade** of the people that we have **blessed**...



To **atone** for something is to make amends. We, in the Christian Church, celebrate the promise that Jesus *atoned* for the sins of the world in his death and resurrection. His gift brings us all back into a loving relationship with God – we, who were estranged in sin, our now made ONE with God – all for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Atonement = at-one-ment – you and I are assured that we are made one with God through the gift of baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God! Amen.