**Psalm 32**

**Knowing the benefits of a life with God**

We are moving on through our series of sermons on the Psalms and this morning, we are thinking briefly about Psalm 32, which we have just heard read.

 It is a really interesting Psalm that speaks to us of the relationship that we can enjoy with God and the intimacy that we can share with him if we spend time reflecting on all that he has done for us through Jesus Christ. And all that he has done for us through Jesus is deeply rooted in his death on the cross for us and how he has won for us forgiveness of our sins, our wrongdoings through that sacrificial act.

 And by way of introduction, I want to say something about the relationship between God’s forgiveness of our sins and the need for us to confess our sins. Because the two are related - but what is the connection?

 Because there seems to be a complexity about this. If Jesus dealt with all our sins when he died on the cross 2,000 years ago, then why do we need to confess our sins to God? Surely if they are all washed away by the blood of Jesus, we don’t need to talk to God about them and ask for his forgiveness? Or is it that our sins are not really forgiven until we ask God to forgive them? In which case, we would need to name our sins before God every day in order for him to forgive each one. But what happens if we have forgotten a particular sin and forget to ask God to forgive it? Does that sin stay on the record against us until we remember it before God?

 This isn’t just some philosophical issue: it is a live issue for very many people who live their lives with a deep sense of guilt and shame about their past offences and feel that they need to go into real detail with God so that they can somehow earn his forgiveness. Some people are so terrified of their past offences that it prevents them from living full lives in the present

 So what is this relationship between confession of sin and forgiveness really about?

 Well, I think the most important truth is that God has dealt with our sins already. When Jesus died 2,000 years ago on that cross, all of our sins were washed away by his blood and, even though each one of us still sins and falls short of God, the truth is that sin has no more power over us inasmuch as our eternal destiny is no longer determined by our sin; our eternal destiny is now determined by God’s grace towards us.

 But the confession of our sins is still really important, for two reasons

 First, there is a temptation for us to take our sins lightly and not really to think about the consequences of them. Sometimes we might think, “Well, I know it’s wrong – but it doesn’t really matter: it’s only a small thing”. Or maybe we have thought, “Well, I know it’s wrong – but God will forgive me”. I know that I have thought both of those things many, many times in my life and it’s a real abuse of God’s grace: to minimize our sins is to take for granted what Christ did for us on the cross. So by confessing our sins to God, we are able to focus more on the sacrifice of Christ and the consequences of our actions and therefore not be so tempted to take his love for us for granted. And that’s really important.

 But there’s something else going on as well when we confess our sins to God, which is more to do with a psychological benefit than a directly spiritual benefit. Carrying the weight of our wrongdoings with out talking to God about them can cause all sorts of stress and anxiety. As the Psalmist writes in verses 3-5: “While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long…Then I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not hide my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord – and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” All the while the Psalmist held onto his wrongdoings in silence, he suffered from stress and anxiety. But as soon as he talked to God about things, he felt lighter in his spirit.

 So there is definitely real benefits to confessing our wrongdoing to God: not that he is waiting for us to do it before he forgives us; that has already happened on the cross of Calvary 2,000 years ago…But because it helps us to reflect more on what our forgiveness cost Jesus and because it helps us psychologically to let go of the past so that we can be freed to live life in all its fullness in the present.

 So confession of our wrongdoings to God is a really important first step in being freed to live our lives as disciples of Jesus.

 And that then transforms our relationship with God, of course, and draws us into a deeper intimacy with him. And the Psalmist picks up on this in verse 7 where he writes this: “You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.”

 As we move into a deeper relationship with God, so we come to realize more personally all that he does for us; forgiveness of sins, cleansing of our conscience, preserving us in time of trouble, protecting us in the face of danger, and so much more…

 God is for us, not against us. And that has been proved by the cross of Christ and his ongoing care for us throughout life.

 And so, in this Psalm in verse 8, God takes over the conversation at this point and tells us how we can live wisely in the light of our experience of him in verse 8 and 9, God says this: “I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle…”

 God has forgiven our sins.

 God has cleansed our consciences.

 God has promised to protect us.

 And now he offers to lead us through our lives and he urges us to follow his leading; not that he will force us, like a mule having to be pulled around with a bit and bridle, but willingly and with confidence that he will always lead us in the ways that are best for us.

 And so the Psalm ends in verse 11, with this call to praise: “Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart”. If we know God’s forgiveness, if we know God’s cleansing, if we know God’s protection, if we know God’s leading in our lives…why wouldn’t we want to praise him? Why wouldn’t our hearts be lifted up?

 Being in a relationship with the living God is the source of our greatest joy in life. There is nothing to compare to knowing his love for us and in response to that, we want to praise and rejoice and devote ourselves to following wherever he leads.

 So as we come to Holy Communion now, we do so with grateful hearts. Through Christ, God has shown his love for us and sharing the bread and the wine together is the way we remember together all that he has done for us. We come to Holy Communion with thankful hearts for all that God has done for us. And our prayer is that we will continually know his leading of us into the future and that we will willingly go wherever he leads.