Micah 6:1-6 (EHV)

LORD, TO YOU I MAKE CONFESSION
1. I have sinned and gone astray
2. On you I cast my burden

The woman security agent at the airport approached the guy in front of me and asked: Would you be willing to be searched? When he said yes, she asked three more questions: May I touch your back? May I touch your ankles? May I touch your stomach? After doing all that touching, he was pronounced clean. We all like to be clean. Many people have jobs producing cleansers because we want clean clothes, clean bodies, clean air, clean cars, teeth, and pets. We often search for what is described as the latest and best in cleansers.

Our God also conducts searches, not randomly, but of everyone. We acknowledge that when we say with the psalmist: Lord, you have investigated me, and you know. you know when I sit down and when I get up. You understand my thoughts from far off. You keep track of when I travel and when I stay, and you are familiar with all my ways. Before there is a word on my tongue, you, Lord, already know it completely.

The result of his search is that he finds us dirty and guilty. And there is not a compatible cleanser found anywhere, except through a process which we want to speak of today. It begins with the words: LORD, TO YOU I MAKE CONFESSION. That means I have sinned and gone astray and on you I cast my burden.

In this book of Micah, the Lord is in the courtroom with his people. He is the Prosecutor, the Witness, the Jury, and the Judge. Rise, Micah says for the Lord, The Lord has a case against his people. He claims that mountains and hills have been his ears and eyes. Mt Sinai saw the Lord enter into a covenant agreement with his people. On Mt Zion there were many worship services that brought God near to his people and them closer to him. But how many times did those same hills witness Israel's shameful idolatry, the worship of false gods, plus lies, violence and dishonesty?

That is why God had some questions. My people, what have I done to you, and how have I made you weary? Did you act that way because of something I did or said? For the record, God said, in effect: I delivered you from Egyptian slavery. The Passover incident gave a preview of the spiritual deliverance from sin through Jesus, the Lamb of God. I gave you strong leaders in Moses and Aaron and Miriam. The Balak and Balaam story reminds you of how I delivered you from evil men. Have I been unfair? Did I break any promises? Have I made impossible demands on you?

The courtroom of the Lord is a familiar place to us. We are in it every day. And shall we review the fact that the walls of our homes and work sites, the insides of our cars, and any place we might think to be secret – they have been the eyes and ears of the Lord? There is nothing, nor any place, that successfully filters out the sin of putting people and things ahead of God. Nothing hides the record of lies to spouses at home, or lies to teachers at school. Nothing covers up any dishonesty at work.

Behind our open and secret sins is our Lord's flawless record of faithfulness to us. His preservation and protection, the food and drink, health, family members, treasured friends, government - it all comes from his hand. But when he looks at all our sins, he asks, Why? Can you hear the hurt in his voice when he asks: My people, what have I done to you and how have I made you weary?

Do you know how Israel replied to the recitation of God's faithfulness? What shall we bring to you, they wanted to know. What can we do to make up for our faults? How about burnt offerings, or choice calves? If God is not satisfied with quality, how about quantity? Would
he like thousands of rams, and 10,000 rivers of olive oil? Or child sacrifices?

That was a pretty sorry defense. They stood convicted by the Lord's charges, but they try to bargain with God in order to appease him. They were willing to do anything for the Lord, except what he wanted. There was no evidence of sorrow over their sins.

Can we learn something from that when it comes to hearing the Lord's charges against us? Or are we sufficiently proud at times to think at least a portion of our lives is so commendable that God owes us one now and then? Like when Dad says: Since we are all going to church today, I suppose we can expect good roads so the family can gather for the Super Bowl. It is awfully easy to bargain with God. All we need do is minimize our faults and inflate our pluses. In the city of Corinth, Paul spoke of people who thought they were something - men of wealth, city fathers, scholars - people with pretty big opinions of themselves. That is the attitude under which we think we have something to offer God and we tend to dicker with him to get what we want. I will cut out this habit, if you will improve my health. I will do this for you, if you heal my sister. That is bargaining with God.

There is a different approach for us. When God's Law shows us our sins and how they hurt the heart of our God, and therefore condemnation is the automatic ruling of the Judge, then the next move is up to us. It is not bargaining or dickering. It is called repentance. In fact, we thank our God for his love in alerting us to the fate that awaited us. Then we get on our knees before God and plead guilty with broken and contrite hearts for the times when we were ready to do anything to appease our God, except what he wanted. I have sinned and gone astray, we are forced to admit.

Do you know where we have escaped to, in order to make that confession? We are all huddled at a most unexpected site, the cross of Jesus. That is where the grace of God truly shines; sadly it is also the place that's often shunned. You heard how the Corinthian people loved everything that had to do with human wisdom. To them an escape from sin and guilt through a cross was foolishness, the silliest thing they ever heard. All the self-made wise still believe the cross is for the weak and stupid. Everyone thinks his own plan of dealing with guilt will work.

But it does not just happen that the worldly wise reject Jesus and his cross. In his wisdom, God saw to it that the world would never find him through human ingenuity and brilliance. God's way has nothing to do with human wisdom. Instead, it pleased him through the so called foolishness of preaching the cross of Jesus to save those who believe. That is our status before God. We have been spared the consequences of our guilt by believing Jesus took our place and made the payment for our sin on the cross with his life blood.

Only that is not just a status. The cross is an every day place for our sin burdens. Luther gave us a good guideline by which to examine ourselves for sin. Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, employer or employee? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful or lazy? Have you hurt anyone by word or deed? Have you been dishonest, careless, wasteful or done other wrong? Those are among the sin burdens we lay on Jesus' cross. We truly treasure casting our sins on Jesus, because like Micah says in the next chapter here: Who is a God like you, who forgives guilt. You will throw all their sins into the depths of the sea. They are gone because the cross of Jesus erases every trace of them. That, of course, is the emphasis of all of our worship services. So come. Our gracious Savior lays before us the full extent of his love during our services. It is a good time to be unburdened and refreshed spiritually.

That cross is also the symbol that reminds us to take all our burdens and lay them on Jesus. Is any sick among you? Do you have a big decision to make? Have the every day burdens or guiding children and running a household gotten you down? Have you been given
the privilege of an elective or appointive office, or a volunteer position in the church? Take the burden of all those responsibilities to the cross of Jesus. His love makes our yokes easier and our burdens lighter when we cast them on him.

And when you know we are so indebted to our Lord for all that he has given, we are grateful for the challenge he puts before us: To carry out justice and love mercy and walk in humility with your God. No, these are not things we can surely work at to gain God's favor. These are ways by which we show our appreciation. To carry out justice means to acknowledge that the standards for what is right do not come from our minds, but from the Word of God. And then we are willing to treat others justly with a God-pleasing love and kindness. To love mercy is to act like the father of the prodigal son in the Bible. Even though he was most offended, he practiced Jesus' compassion and forgiveness on his straying son.

And best yet, is to walk in humility with your God. What else would he anticipate from us, who are so keenly aware of our spiritual poverty, our condemned status by nature - yet cleansed from the guilt of our sin by Jesus. By ourselves we have only a pitiable self-defense. But when we sin, we have an Advocate before the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. Jesus is the perfect Attorney, who speaks to his Father in our behalf on the basis of his bloodshed. Friends, savor and use the privilege of telling Jesus you have sinned and gone astray, but that you cast your sin and all your burdens on him and find in him perfect healing. Amen.

Pastor Keith Bilitz
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Alma City
Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church, Smiths Mill
St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, St. Clair