

Mixtape: “Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word” - Psalm 32

Norwalk Christian Church, March 1, 2020, Lent 1, Year A, Mixtape: Greatest Hits from the Psalms

“Now, the making of a good compilation tape is a very subtle art,” says the character Rob Gordon in the 2000 film “High Fidelity. The movie is set in the early 90s, and Rob, who loves a good list, is recounting his five greatest breakups, while he tries to win over a girl, Laura. So, he does what many did in the 80s and 90s. He makes her a mixtape. A compilation of songs, placed in the perfect order, to express how you feel about someone. Done correctly, a mixtape could change your life forever.

And so, Rob shares how he does it. “Many do's and don'ts,” he says. “First of all you're using someone else's poetry to express how you feel. This is a delicate thing. You gotta kick off with a killer, to grab attention. Then you got to take it up a notch, but you don't wanna [over do it], so then you got to cool it off a notch. There are a lot of rules.”

It's hard expressing how you feel about someone, using your own words. With the intensity of emotion rising up inside of you, the words often come out in a jumble. And so, we turn to someone else's poetry. Hallmark cards. Love songs. Romantic poets.

Couples have “a song”, poetry set to music that captures their relationship perfectly. Marti, do you remember our song from when we were dating? The Carpenters, *Close to You*.

Why do birds suddenly appear, everytime you are near? Just like me, they long to be, close to you. Awwwwww.

I could never have come up with such sappy sentiment on my own. But it was the perfect song, because I longed to be close to Marti. The perfect song or mixtape of songs can express one's feelings better than anything else.

So it is with our faith. Our faith tradition gives us a mixtape, a collection of songs about our relationship with God, that has been named The Psalms. And over the 6 weeks of Lent, we are going to look at 6 of the best, songs arranged on a Mixtape that travel through the range of human emotion and our relationship with God. I hope you enjoy the mixtape.

Track 1: “Sorry Seems to Be the Hardest Word.” Written by Elton John and Bernie Taupin in 1975, recorded on Elton's *Blue Moves* album, and reaching #1 on the Adult Contemporary charts, it describes a relationship that is falling apart. Lovers, so caught up in themselves, in their argument, in being right, that they cannot say “Sorry.”

Listen to the first verse:

What I gotta do to make you love me, What I gotta do to make you care, What do I do when lightnin' strikes me, And I wake to find that you're not there? What I got to do to make you want me?, What I got to do to be heard?, What do I say when it's all over?, Sorry seems to be the hardest word

*It's sad, so sad, It's a sad, sad situation, And it's getting more and more absurd
It's sad, so sad, Why can't we talk it over?, Oh, it seems to me, That sorry seems to be the hardest word.*

So many words said as a relationship fails. Yet the one word that could change it all, Sorry, never uttered.

With this as the first song on our Mixtape, it seems this relationship has reached hard times.

Psalm 32 is another song that speaks of the power of the word “Sorry.” Yet, the song was written on the other side of that difficult word. The Psalmist begins the song with the word, “Happy”. Some translations render it “Blessed”, but the meaning is the same. You are blessed, you are happy—not when everything goes your way, but when you mess up, and your transgression is forgiven, when your sins are covered.

Then the song describes the pain that Elton John sings about. When I kept silence, when I did not confess and say “Sorry”, “my body wasted away through my groaning all day long...my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.”

It was a sad, sad situation, and it was getting more and more absurd.

When I do something wrong, my initial inclination is to try to explain it away. “Did what I say offend you? Well, you probably heard me wrong. Why are you so sensitive, anyway? I had good intentions, after all. You can’t be mad at me for having good intentions! Besides, you do the same thing all the time! Why, just last week you said this to me...not that I’m keeping tabs or anything.”

Of course, I would never say anything like that to Marti!

We dig in our heels. Argue and argue, defending ourselves to the death. When all we need to say is, “I’m sorry, I hurt you.”

“When I kept silence, my body wasted away.”

But after resisting, after holding out almost until the point of death, the Psalmist confesses and then finds redemption.

I have a Confession: *confession* is not something we talk much about in “liberal” churches. Many of us come out of traditions that focused heavily on confession, teaching that any sin that’s been committed must be named before God if we want to be forgiven.

The guilt is often unbearable. I remember wondering as a child, if I were to get into a fatal car accident and yell out a strand of profanity right before the accident happened, would I go to hell, because I had no time to ask forgiveness for saying curse words? Yes, yes...I was a bit messed up.

Such guilt-induced sentiment misses the point of confession. Confession isn’t a required action done to escape punishment and earn forgiveness and love. The love is already there. God’s love and forgiveness is always there. Confession is more about me than God. Confession is my admitting that I messed up--being honest about who I am and what I have done.

To confess, I am not perfect. I have messed up. My words. My actions--they hurt people sometimes. I’ve done things and left some things undone. And even when I have the best of intentions, I still screw it all up. There is great freedom in admitting the truth, in letting go of the lies, and finally being honest about yourself.

Confession heals. Confession restores. Confession tears down walls, and opens ourselves up to God’s love--love that is always there, ready and waiting.

Realizing God’s love, the Psalmist sings out: “You are my hiding place. You always fill me up with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.”

Letting go of the guilt and the stubbornness and the dishonesty--the Psalmist finds joy and rest in God.

That’s the turning point in the song, where it turns instructional.

“Don’t be stubborn like a mule,” the Psalmist sings. Admit your faults! Say you’re wrong, like I did! Say you’re sorry!

“Many are the torments of the wicked--tormented from the pain they cause themselves and to others. But steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.”

The true joy the Psalmist finds through confession, is available for all. And the song ends in celebration: “Be glad! Rejoice! Shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”

Elton John’s song...well, it ends not so joyfully. He’s back where he started: *What do I do to make you love me? What I got to do to be heard? What do I do when lightning strikes me? Yeah, What have I got to do? What have I got to do When sorry seems to be the hardest word?*

Confession. It's the answer. When in doubt, confess. Confess that you're wrong. Confess that you're not enough. Confess that you've messed up, that you will probably do it again.

Let's try it. If you want, repeat after me this confession. I am human. I am sinful. I am frail. I am limited. I fail. I am sorry.

Doesn't it feel good to just say it? To be honest.

And here's the Gospel truth: We fail! But we are never failures. For we serve a God who always loves and always forgives. Who hides us away, protecting us, filling our mouths with songs of deliverance, even when we have a hard time speaking. A God who breathes new life into our bodies, when we feel wasted away.

That's why we can confess: Happy are those whose sin is covered up by the steadfast love of the Lord.

Beloved of God, Be glad in the LORD and rejoice. Shout for joy, O righteous, and all you upright in heart. For God's love will never, ever let us go. Amen!