

A spring day in the pastor's office; my first Lent and Holy Week at Pennside were finished; the sun was shining; a gentle breeze blew through my open windows. It was going to be a good day.

Then the phone rang, "Dave, there's a snake in the basement!" Adrenaline surged through my system as visions of coiled serpents came to mind. I dashed down the stairs, drove home, put on my leather work gloves, and descended to the basement. I was prepared for battle. If I must endure the venom of a snake bite, so be it. Sometimes, "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

I looked around. Where was the snake? "It's right there." Our dog Beanie ran down the stairs and hopped on the couch. He didn't seem worried. Where was the snake? There, that, my vision of a coiled rattlesnake evaporated as I faced the reality of a baby garter snake. I reached down, took it in hand, and took it outside to deal with it. Sometimes, "a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

Hunter's baptism invites us consider what we've "gotta do." We're invited to "remember [our] baptism and be thankful." That attitude of gratitude empowers us to "improve on our baptism," to grow into the image of God we were created to be.

To that end, we're going to consider "the word of life;" the grace of God in Jesus Christ our Lord, grace into which Hunter and we are baptized. This grace is expressed in this classic passage, *1 John 1:8-9 (NRSV) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

The word of life sets us free from the snakes in our basement.

___ Snakes in the basement

"There's a snake in the basement" creates a certain level of urgency in us. This is something that has to be dealt with immediately. If we do not respond, the problem will get worse.

For instance, my father-in-law tells the story of his childhood days in Columbia,

PA. One day, he caught a garter snake; a long garter snake, which he brought home. "Boys will be boys." He brought the snake into the house. Why? "Boys will be boys," and boys get hungry, so he put the snake down so he could get a snack from the refrigerator. When he closed the refrigerator door, the snake was gone. He searched for the snake. He searched high; he searched low; where, O where, did the snake go? His efforts were in vain, so he concluded that the snake had made its escape. He ate his snack and forgot about it, until ... about one month later he heard his mother shriek his name and demand he come to the kitchen, "Right now!"

The mystery of the missing snake was solved. It had "escaped" under the refrigerator, and it had come back out. And he had to deal with it – now! She would deal with him later. Sin is like that snake. It's something we have to deal with, and the sooner we deal with it the better. Sin separates us from God. God still loves us. God still cares for us, but we are not as aware of God's loving kindness. We feel separate, estranged, and if that continues, we come to the place where we feel nothing at all – no guilt, no remorse, no desire to make positive changes in our lives. We're numb. We feel nothing - no hope, no joy, no peace. We're unable to love or be loved, because there's no room in our soul for someone else; we're too full of ourselves.

There's a snake in the basement; there's a serpent in our souls, and we have to deal with it; the sooner, the better.

— The Word of Life

"Confession is good for the soul." It is a word of life. Confession is calling a snake, a snake, a sin, a sin. Confession is agreeing with God (that's the root meaning of the word "confess" "to agree"); we agree that we've fallen short of God's standard; we didn't do the good we could; we did do what we shouldn't have done; we allowed our anxiety to compel us to take matters into our own hands rather than entrusting our cares into the hands of God. We fell short; we sinned; we need to change, which by the way is what the term "repent" means; we turn from ourselves and turn to God.

Confession begins to move us beyond ourselves. As the wisdom of Alcoholics Anonymous has taught us, admitting that we have a problem is the first step towards solving it. This isn't booking passage on the SS Guilt Trip. It may well be the way we get off that doomed ship because the hope implicit in confession is that we can be free from the power of guilt and shame; sin isn't the last word about us; the last word is God's word; the last word is the word of life!

The radical good news of Easter, the word of life, is that sin isn't permanent! Forgiveness is! John writes: *1 John 2:1-2 (NRSV) My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Consider my basement; it's a nice basement; it's my man-cave. I'm in good space when I'm in my basement. There was a snake in my basement. That wasn't good; I had to do something about that, and I did; and now, I'm back in good space.

The snake isn't permanent! Sin isn't permanent. Forgiveness restores us to our original condition. Sin is like tarnish on a fine piece of silver. If we don't deal with it, the tarnish deepens; it mars the beauty of the piece; but when we confess, God forgives because of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; God's grace removes the tarnish and the original beauty of the person is restored!

This is the promise and possibility of Hunter's baptism, of your baptism and mine. He is an infant. He can't answer all these questions, nor does he have to. He doesn't receive grace this day because of what he has done. He receives grace because of what Jesus has done.

When we confess, we receive grace because of what Jesus has done. This is the humility to which Jesus refers when He tells us to receive the kingdom like a child. Forgiveness is not earned; forgiveness is not deserved; forgiveness is given by God. "To err is human, to forgive divine." We do not receive grace because of what we've done, nor do we have to do something special to "make it up" to God; Jesus is the atoning sacrifice; Jesus is the one who offers His perfect prayer, His complete obedience, His sinless perfection on our behalf. He is the one who

removes the wrong and restores the right.

When the rubber hits the road, push comes to shove, and there's a snake in the basement, forgiveness is not about you. It's about Jesus, all about Jesus, only about Jesus.

Hunter's baptism invites us to remember our own baptism; to hear again the good news that sin is temporary but God's forgiveness is permanent. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. We can receive it and live each day in grateful obedience.

On that journey, if you sin again, if you discover a snake in the basement, deal with it! Thanks be to God you can! Deal with it sooner rather than later. Remember your baptism! Confess sin as sin. Receive the gift of God's forgiveness. Sin doesn't have the last word on you. The last word is God's word; the last word is Jesus Christ, the word of life. Amen.