



[Pastor Keith GeRue](#)

***Sermon for Ash Wednesday***

*February 18, 2026*

## A Life of Standing With **2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I remember when I was little, my mother making me take responsibility when I did something wrong. She would make me go to the person I wronged - whether it was a neighbor, a stranger (if possible), or a family member, and try to make it right. I was horrified. I never wanted to. Far easier would be to cover it up or plan a way of escape. And believe me, I made such plans in my head! But my mother knew that easier is not better. That sometimes the best things are the hardest things. I had to take responsibility. I had to make it right if I could. It was humiliating. But it taught me that sin has consequences. And such repentance taught me far more than any punishment could.

Now that I'm grown up - or like to think that I am! at least physically - I still don't like repenting, confessing, or admitting I'm wrong. I still would rather cover up my sin or plan a way of escape. And I suspect many of you are like that, too. So, Mother Church brings us together on this day, to uncover what we've covered up, to block our way of escape, and says: *repent!* Of all the ways, all the times you've hurt not just others, but sinned against your God. And she does so not to punish us, but because this is good for us. Not only to vomit out all that poison that is making us sin-sick, but so that we can also hear those wonderful words of Absolution - *I forgive you* - from the very God we've sinned against, so repeatedly and so egregiously. Because while I can maybe make things right between you and me when I sin against you, how can I make things right with God? I can't.

My prayers can't. My alms can't. My fasting can't. Because that's not where my holiness comes from. If I think it does, then I'm **belittling** my sin and the God I've sinned against, and I'm **exalting** myself and my abilities, and that makes me the hypocrite. I may *look* holy, but I know I'm not. It's all a show. And my reward? Maybe the esteem of others like me, but I'm robbing myself of hearing the words of forgiveness I need to hear. The words that can truly make a difference and make me what I am not - *holy*.

Now when I was little and in trouble, my mother would do something else as well - she wouldn't just make me take responsibility and go to the person I wronged and confess - *she would go with me*. At first, I thought it was to make sure I actually did it! And maybe that was part of the reason. But now I realize this, too: by going with me, *she was taking some of the shame upon herself*. She taught me what to say, and if I didn't know what to



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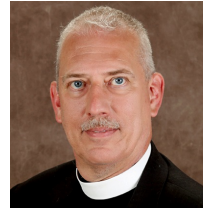
say, she would give me the words. If I had to pay for something I'd broken but didn't have the money, she'd pay. She was my advocate. And she was protecting me, too. If that person wanted a pound of my flesh, wanted to retaliate - they'd have to go through her first! And you don't mess with a mama bear, right?

Today, Mother Church is doing some of those same things. We are coming to repent *together*; we are not alone. She gives us the words to speak. But she is not our advocate, nor can she pay for us, nor can she protect us from the evil foe who wants not just a pound of your flesh, but *all of it*, in hell. But she knows who our advocate is, who did pay for us, and who does protect us - and points us in that direction tonight. **To Jesus**, whose blood and righteousness not only cover our sin and guilt and shame but take it away.

So, we heard these words tonight from the Apostle Paul: ***We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*** Don't cover up your sin. Don't plan an escape. Repent. Because ***for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*** Jesus took our sin and guilt and shame to make us right again. That we be holy - not just on the outside, but on the inside. I couldn't do that. No one else could do that. Only Jesus.

And it wasn't easy for Him. He was mocked and rejected for hanging out with the likes of us. I may have dreaded facing those I wronged, and for what - *one sin*? When Jesus was faced with bearing ALL my sins of ALL my life, and ALL the sins of ALL people and all *their* lives, ALL people who EVER lived, bearing those before His Father with us, for us . . . His agony was so great His sweat was *like great drops of blood*. And then when He was pounded onto the cross and hung there to die like a piece of human garbage, many of the people He was doing that for laughed at Him. And all Jesus had to say was *Father, forgive them*. Words you also heard tonight. And He does. And you are. Because of Jesus. The Father forgives. And you are forgiven.

That's not an escape. If we think it is, so that we can just go back out and sin some more, then we are of those who, as Paul said, ***receive the grace of God in vain.*** This is a **new life**. A life of holiness, not sin. A life of service, not selfishness. ***It's a life of standing with.*** That's one way to translate and think of what Paul said next, when he said ***as servants of God*** - as the redeemed of God - ***we commend ourselves in every way.*** And with those words he's not saying that they're patting themselves on their backs - it's not that kind of commendation. He's saying that as servants of God, they're living a new life, *giving* themselves to, *uniting* themselves with, or **standing with these Christians** in every way, and in everything. The Corinthians are not alone. They are part of a bigger body, the Church, the body of Christ.



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And so, Paul says, **We stand with you** in every way - and then he lists that lengthy list of troubles that they are standing with the Corinthians in ***afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, and hunger***. Not an easy thing to do!

So how do they do that? ***By purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand*** (the church) ***and for the left*** (the world); ***through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise***.

And for all this, do they look holy? Actually, the very opposite!

Paul says ***We are treated as impostors*** (as deceivers) and ***yet are true***; this is the truth. Jesus as His life is the truest of truths.

We are treated ***as unknown*** (we're ignored), ***and yet well known***; they know who we are. They just don't like that we're not like them. ->

We are treated ***as dying*** (having no future, for all the outward troubles that afflict us!), ***and behold, we live***, because our true life is not in these things. We have a life that cannot end!

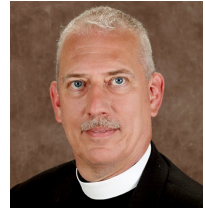
We are ***punished*** (for all this kindness!), ***and yet not killed***; they can't take away our life in Christ.

We are treated ***as sorrowful*** (as ignorant, stupid, gullible, mentally ill people to be pitied) yet ***always rejoicing***; in this life that Christ has given us!

We are treated ***as poor, yet making many rich***, because we are rich with the true riches of Christ.

We are treated ***as having nothing*** (because our riches cannot be seen; they are not of this world and life) yet ***possessing everything*** - because we are baptized children of God.

And this is now the life we have, in Jesus. The one who stood with us, the one who hung for us, and who rose and lives for us. **So, we stand with each other**. Parents with their children, and when their parents get older, children with their parents. Spouses, friends,



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neighbors, fellow believers. It won't be easy. It might not look like much. But it's not for nothing that Jesus died for us and forgives us and gives us a new life. It's not so we can have an *easy* life, but a *better* life. A life with Him and in Him, both now and forever.

And that's why the Church has commended prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during this season of Lent. Not for us to earn favor from God; we can't. Not for us to look holy; we're not. Not to be hypocrites, as if by doing these things we are better than others. Nope, nope, and nope. It's because **in these ways we stand with others**. Joining them in their troubles, helping as we can, and lifting them to God.

That's what my mother did for me. She helped me, stood with me, and showed me a better way. Mother Church is doing the same for us. That repenting of our sins, we are pointed to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who forgives us and raises us up to a better life. A new and eternal life. Now. As Paul said: ***Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*** Now! Don't put it off. Don't wait. Don't look for an escape. Behold, now your Jesus is here for you, His Body and Blood are here for you, His life is here for you. **Come**, eat, and drink. And then **go** in His peace and joy and stand with those in need. Even if no one knows. Even if no one sees. Your Father does.

***And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.***

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.