

10.23.2022 Trinity 19 (Ephesians 4:17-32; Matthew 9:1-8; Psalm 32)

Last week I read an article that asked this question: Would you do what you are about to do if you knew it would be the last thing you'd do? If your name was Willie Spence, I suspect the answer to that question would be yes. Willie Spence was the runner-up on the 2021 season of the television show American Idol. He was a young Christian man who spoke about his dream of using his voice to reach the world, and the hope of one day winning a Grammy. Tragically, two weeks ago he was killed in a car accident at the age of twenty-three.

Just hours before the fatal crash, he posted a video of himself on his social media account. The one minute clip, which would turn out to be his last, showed Willie alone in his car singing a hymn titled: *You are my Hiding Place*. The lyrics of that hymn declare, O God, "*You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart, with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.*" Would you do what you are about to do if you knew it would be the last thing you'd do? Willie Spence may not have won a Grammy for his final performance, but the fact that we're talking about him this morning, and that hundreds of thousands of people have viewed that clip, is evidence that his dream of using his voice to reach the world, and to reach it for Christ, was certainly fulfilled.

The hymn this young man sang, *You are my Hiding Place*, is based on Psalm 32. This penitential psalm, written by David, speaks about the heartache of secret sin, the importance of confession, and the unspeakable joy that is found in forgiveness. In this psalm, David uses images of the physical body to help us recognize the devastating effect that secret sin has on our soul. He writes about those sins we try to hide, saying, "*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer*" (32:3-4).

These verses paint a vivid picture of David wasting away, his strength drying up like a potted plant left without water in the heat of the desert sun, and this illustration helps us see how the grief, shame, and guilt that always accompany secret sin eats away at the soul, stealing our peace, robbing us of any real joy. David provides us with an accurate description of the many terrible ways the sins we try to hide end up affecting us, and I imagine we

each know all too well the experience he's describing, because we've been there.

As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23), or as we read 1 Kings, "*there is no one who does not sin,*" (1 Kings 8:46), or as St. John reminds us, "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8). The war is won, our Savior Christ conquered death (Revelation 1:18), yet we still battle against the world (1 John 2:15-17), the flesh (1 Peter 2:11), and the devil (1 Peter 5:8). We wrestle "*against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Ephesians 6:12). We strive to "*enter in through the narrow gate*" (Matthew 7:13), but like David, who tried to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba by having her husband Uriah killed (2 Samuel 11-12), or like our first parents who attempted to hide their sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:8), or like our society that makes every effort to redefine what is sin, by continually asking the ancient question Satan asked Eve: "*Did God really say...*" (Genesis 3:1), it is true that in different ways we all *fall short of the glory of God*.

We all fall short, and for those who know the heartache of secret sin, Psalm 32 offers this remedy: Confession. David writes, "*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin*" (32:5). His words bring to mind that well-known, parallel verse in which St. John states, "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9).

It is such Divine forgiveness and cleansing that leads to true healing and unspeakable joy, because the forgiven soul is no longer wasting away, the forgiven soul is no longer drying up like a potted plant left without water in the heat of the desert sun, but instead, the one who is forgiven and cleansed has found sure refuge in God. Therefore this is the soul who is able to boldly declare, O God, "*You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart, with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You.*" God provides a hiding place, a safe place of protection where His people can confess their sins and find forgiveness, cleansing, and healing.

God is our *hiding place*, and yet time and again, sin will lead us to hide from

Him, instead of hiding in Him. It's been this way from the beginning. This is exactly what happened in the Garden when our first parents chose to sin, and then hid from God. Sin has always been the problem, but sin is the problem that Jesus came to confront and to conquer, and in conclusion I'd ask you to consider how clearly that truth is revealed in the Gospel we read this morning.

In that passage a paralyzed man, lying on a bed, was brought to our Lord. The text tells us, "*When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven'*" (Matthew 9:2). Notice the remarkable fact that when Jesus saw this paralyzed man, lying on a bed, unable to move, His first priority was not physical healing. Remember, it is man that "*looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart*" (1 Samuel 16:7). Therefore, our Lord's primary concern was their faith (*Jesus saw their faith*), and his forgiveness (*Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven*). It wasn't until the end of this interaction that physical healing came when our Lord declared: "*But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins - then He said to the paralytic, 'Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house'*" (Matthew 9:6).

A paralyzed man was brought to our Lord lying on a bed, and when he "*arose and departed to his house*" (Matthew 9:7), the reason Jesus told him to "*be of good cheer*" was not due to the fact that he got up and walked home, but instead, because his sins were forgiven. The greatest good work of Christ is not found in physical healing, but in the forgiveness of sin. In this life, we may or may not be freed from our physical afflictions, but as St. Paul declares, we "*have been set free from sin*" (Romans 6:18).

Two weeks ago Willie Spence was killed in a car accident at the age of twenty-three. Physical healing was not something he received, but to hear that young man sing, O God, "*You are my hiding place. You always fill my heart, with songs of deliverance. Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You,*" to hear him sing the words of psalm 32 is to know he received the healing we all desire. May God give us grace to follow his good example, to longer hide from God, but to find our hiding place in Him.