

Forgiveness in worship

By [F. Dean Lueking](#)

January 10, 2011

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I am among those called to lead people in confessing sin and announcing God's forgiveness in the Sunday liturgy, an essential action never altogether free from the threat of routinized going-through-the-motions. This action is anything but routine, however, when it occurs in the setting I [described](#) in my lectionary column for the *Century* on this week's Gospel lesson (subscription required).

In thinking through that unforgettable moment again, I am reminded of what a momentous thing happens when the words of confession and absolution are spoken in the worship gathering. If the liturgical form means the same words are spoken again and again, year in and year out, it is well at times to find fresh language to speak what is literally death-dealing to sinful pride and life-giving for discipleship.

Can liturgy breathe sufficiently to occasionally allow such innovation to replace overly familiar language? Or--can such an action be prefaced by silence, enough to allow people to have their wits about them before speaking to God and each other of the deep things of the soul? Or--can the confession and absolution be relocated in the liturgy at times, so that it falls after a sermon that calls people to confess and forgive with unmistakable reference to vexing issues in the congregation and community?

Humbling oneself before God in confessing sin and holding onto forgiveness for dear life is the most countercultural action imaginable in our distracted, conflicted times. Where else in town does this kind of thing take place? Who else summons people to deal with what's killing them on the inside and what lifts guilt away?

It's good news that we're free in Christ to leave the garbage at the foot of the cross and keep forgiveness moving into the daily relationships where it is priceless.