

Oversharing. In the real world, it seems to happen all the time. We call it TMI: too much information. Sometimes it's WTMI. Way too much information. You might not be familiar with the term, but you undoubtedly know it when it happens. It's the guy in the next cubicle who insists on showing you his rash. TMI. It's Great-Aunt Hilda explaining her issues with indigestion and irregularity. TMI. It's the neighbor who insists on taking the trash to the curb in nothing but his boxers. TMI. WTMI. You get the idea.

In fact, you can probably imagine that as a Pastor....during some of my hospital visits I have had individuals show me things that I really didn't want to see. Perhaps this was because they were used to doctors and nurses coming in to check on them, and they figured that as a man of God it wouldn't hurt to show me as well.

Fortunately, although oversharing exists, most human beings have learned to hide the uncomfortable aspects of their personal lives from others. Most of us have figured out that it's best to keep some things to ourselves in order to maintain our own dignity and protect others from our awkwardness. We've learned how to avoid TMI. But that's in the real world. In the alternative universe we call social media or social networking, a whole different set of rules exists.

Now, I won't go into any details, but these days individuals on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube often share personal and embarrassing information about themselves with a plethora of people that they should probably keep private. In person, oversharing is a no-no, but online it seems to be a nonissue. *Chicago Tribune* columnist Eric Zorn has predicted that within the next 10 years, sharing inane details of one's life in the form of status updates, Twitter feeds, and YouTube clips will evolve into something even more transparent and narcissistic.

Zorn predicts – somewhat sarcastically - that technology will allow something called "LifeCasting," a nearly nonstop, streaming video of one's every moment. If Zorn is correct, then the next big thing will be to literally share every second of one's existence with computers and cell phones around the world. TMI.

It isn't a pleasant thought, is it? Most of us are used to being one person when we're in private - completely alone, with no spouse, no kids, no one at all - and a different person when we're in the presence of others. The "private us" is private for a reason. We say things, look at things, and generally do all sorts of things we'd never attempt to do if we knew someone were watching us. It's been said that the truest test of character is not what you do under pressure, but what you do when no one is looking. Most of us would probably agree!

In Ephesians 5, our New Testament lesson this morning, the apostle Paul presses us to be people of little or no surprises when it comes to our character. To be clear, he doesn't demand perfection. He doesn't expect followers of Jesus Christ to be flawless! Far from it. Paul simply urges us to proactively expose our struggles to the light of day, rather than hide them in the darkness of dishonest living. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them," he writes. "For it is shameful even to speak of the things that are done in secret."

One could argue that Paul wouldn't be completely opposed to the idea of broadcasting your life for the world to see. In his letters to the early church he often urges his fellow Christ followers to live as if the "camera is always on." To be sure, he isn't saying we should live in fear, as if we're being hounded by Big Brother. No, he's telling us to live our lives firmly believing that the more our struggles are exposed to the light of God's Word, and the accountability of God's people, the better off we'll be.

Before we came to faith, all we knew was a life of darkness and hiding. Sure, prior to becoming a Christian we may not have been living a wild, secret life of sin, but our whole existence was still hidden in the dark. We were hidden in the darkness of unbelief. We operated with an ignorance of sin and may not have been all that aware of the necessity of our salvation. Not only that, but our entire existence was hidden from the forgiving power of the cross. The light of God's mercy and grace was shining on others, but not on us. We were stuck. We were in the dark.

But then something happened. The lights came on. And the light itself actually came into the World in the form of God's Word, which entered our atmosphere and started doing its thing - convicting us of sin, stirring up a trust in the Lord, and revealing the truth regarding the depth of our need and the height of God's grace. And now, as forgiven followers of Jesus Christ, we live with the light of God's Word shining over us at all times. Which is probably as far from TMI as we can get and something we most certainly need to know. Paul puts it like this: "At one time you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light."

The reason Paul lifts this idea up, in a very commanding way, is because although the lights are on, so to speak, we're continually tempted to dabble in the dark. Martin Luther described this reality, saying that God's people are - simultaneously righteous and sinful. We're simultaneously living in the light of forgiveness, while at the same time we are longing to indulge in the dark side of our sin. "Not cool," says the apostle Paul! "Walk as children of light!" That is, he tells us to step out of the shadows, and into the shining; to cast our lives in terms of what we know God is calling us to do; to let the light of God and the Word of God inform all that we do.

When we do this, a few things will happen: Truth will reign, and transformation will take place. After all, sin loves secrecy. In secrecy, all the little lies we like to believe are no big deal face no opposition. When we're secretly flirting with a coworker, piling up debt apart from our spouse's knowledge, or searching for naughty images or videos on a computer screen, it's easy to convince ourselves that what we're up to is harmless, deserved, or otherwise normal. But pull that action out of the dark and shine God's Word on it, and we'll see it for what it is: a sin!

Allow a good Christian friend to hold you accountable, giving him or her license to ask any question, and you'll see your actions for what they are: foolish and pointless. In this case, TMI is a good thing. Allowing the light of God to shine on us allows truth to reign. In contrast, nothing good can grow in darkness. Living, healthy things; require light to grow in order to change into something greater. When major parts of our lives are shut up in the dark, hidden from the loving eyes of others and the truth of God's Word, we'll see no personal growth or major change. We'll stay stunted and stuck!

Our narrative continues: "But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light." In other words, the light of God's Word helps us see things clearly, truthfully, and once we see things clearly, we become more godly, and a transformation begins to take place within us. But it all begins by dragging our junk out of the dark using something we might call Godly TMI.

Lent is the perfect time for this! The season's purpose is to place our lives under the intense light of God's Word, preparing our hearts and minds for the gift of Good Friday and the joy of Easter morning. If the idea of LifeCasting, of letting your secret life be seen by others, freaks you out, then it's a sign that confession might indeed be good for your soul during this sacred time of Lent. In fact, you may even want to consider dragging some things out of the dark

by digging into God's Word, and being honest with God's people. After all as followers of Christ we need truth to reign in our lives so that a transformation can take place within us. Perhaps as soon as possible!

The thing about living with a divided, shadow self is that at some point - whether we like it or not - what's done in the dark doesn't stay in the dark. It makes its way into the light. What's done in the dark is exposed. Jesus himself offers a warning: "[N]othing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." Ultimately, everything about a person will be made known. If you don't believe it, just ask the latest athlete who is all over the news because he was caught doping, talk to the latest politician or celebrity whose indiscretions have become front-page news!

But this stuff also happens to those with little names as well, and can feature "little" sins, too. If not today, then perhaps the next day things will come out. But even if we're able to hide stuff our whole lives, someday the truth will come out. Scripture says a day of reckoning approaches. So which will it be? Will we do the hard work of confession now, or will we wait and face the hard truth then?

When it comes to social media, as we have been discovering more and more these days, there's no such thing as TMI. LifeCasting, here we come! But regardless of how social media evolves, we need to remember what a life as a Christ-follower demands. Let's be eager to acknowledge our struggles. And in doing so, truth will triumph, and more often than not a transformation will take place. When we are completely open, truthful, and honest with ourselves and others, grace will be our constant comfort, and forgiveness our closest friend.

At the final reckoning, we won't need to worry about TMI. We won't need to worry about our LifeCast! Our life has already been cast, and we have been forgiven on account of our Lord and Savior's grace and forgiveness!