

Ascension Lutheran Church

Pastor Godkin's Sermon for the week of November 2, 2008

The Blood of the Lamb: The Ultimate Stain Remover (Revelation 7:9-16)

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text is from the 7th chapter of Revelation:

“One of the elders addressed me, saying, ‘Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?’ I said to him, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.’”

This is the text.

Dear friends in Christ, Have you had a good look at some of the cleaning products in your home? They make all kinds of promises: For instance, Cascade dishwasher detergent says that it has “grease fighting power”; Vim Power Cream says that it has bleach that removes stubborn stains; S.O.S. pads say that they clean from A to Z. And every few years products like these come out with a new and improved version that are even said to remove blood stains. They invest millions in finding new ways to remove stains and make things clean.

In our text we find a different kind of stain remover. It removes the toughest, deepest stains. We’re not talking about grass stains here. This stain remover cleans not with chlorine bleach however. What if I told you that the special ingredient of this Cleaner is blood – that’s right blood, ordinarily one of the toughest stains there is. To those who have this special Cleaner our text says “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”. This is the holy precious blood of Christ and it has the power to purify and to wash away even the deepest stains of our sin.

On this All Saints’ Day we celebrate the believers who have gone before us. We celebrate the good works God does through His saints and by God’s grace we look forward to seeing the whole company of saints when Christ returns.

Generally when people think of a saint they think of someone who is pure and perfect. And that definition is quite right actually. This is God’s high standard. If you want to go to heaven you must be pure, you must be perfect. Nothing less will do. One sin, one impure thought, one thoughtless word, one moment of apathy toward God is a blemish that would disqualify someone from entering the heavenly kingdom. As Psalm 24 says, “Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.” And as Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”

So who thinks they qualify? Are you pure? If you think you’re pretty good that’s not good enough. So, clearly we have a problem. We are sinners. We’re stained, we’re filthy in fact. So what is the solution? In essence, we need a good bath. Like the saints who

have gone before us, we need to wash our robes, not at the local drycleaner but at the fount of our Baptism, in the blood of Christ.

Friends, two main things happened when you were Baptized: First, you died to sin and second, you were forgiven and raised with a new nature in Christ. It was a death to the Old Adam and a birth to a new nature in Christ. There you became a child of God. This was a one time event. However, you now have a new life in Christ. This is ongoing. Each day we come back to our Baptism, we repent of our sins and we continually drown the Old Adam, the old sinful nature, and we live before God with pure hearts. We live out the Baptized life as God's people. The spiritual bath of Baptism is ongoing. It is repentance and forgiveness through Christ our Lord.

So where does the blood of the Lamb come into all this? A return to our Baptism is really a return to the cross of Jesus. When Jesus shed His blood on the cross He atoned for your sins. Baptism is a way that God brings Christ and His sacrifice to you personally. In His love, in His grace He counts His repentant children as pure.

Now friends, what would happen if we never washed our clothes? They would start to smell. They would get a little mildewy. Our spiritual clothes need washing often. This is why we confess our sins. It is then that we return to Christ and come to the cross. It is then that we remember the cleansing holy bath of our Baptism. And we put on His pure, clean robes. As Galatians 3 says, "All of you who were Baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." We remember our Baptism and make this good confession at the start of each Sunday service in fact. As we all said together earlier, "If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This is a precious gift, it's so precious in fact that we cannot and we must not take it for granted. God says in Revelation 3, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth." To pray only in church is to be lukewarm; to attend church to socialize only is to be lukewarm; to avoid our Bibles during the week is to be lukewarm. The Bible is God's incredible gift. It is His Word. It is His love letter to you. It is meant to be read to keep you strong in your faith, in your hope for eternal life, and in your love for your neighbour. As God instructed His people of the Old Testament He instructs you. He says, "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds...Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deuteronomy 11).

Friends, what an example we have in the saints who have gone before us, how they washed their robes in repentance and faith in the shed blood of the Lamb – the Christian martyrs who were fed to the lions in Rome, the church reformer Jan Hus who was burned alive for the faith, the apostles who laid the foundation of the church we have today. Their works, their zeal are inspiring because they were inspired by God's grace working through them. This came through the Word they heard, through the shed

blood of the Lamb they received in Holy Communion. It came in their daily walk of repentance in their Baptismal grace.

How great it will be to see them in the heavenly kingdom, to talk with Paul and Abraham, and David, most of all to be the presence of the Lord Himself, to see the glory of our Saviour Jesus Christ and to be received by Him and welcomed by the whole company of heaven into the gates of the kingdom. We have a foretaste of this each time we have communion together. In heaven the whole company of heaven sings praises to God continually. The saints praise the Lamb who was slain. Here on earth we at Ascension and all Christians around the world simply join in with this worship during Holy Communion.

Friends, we join in praising Jesus because He is the ultimate Cleanser. He removes all the stains of sin from A to Z. His pure shed blood has the power to wipe away the deepest spiritual smears. It has the power to give you repentance and new life each day. Go in peace; serve the Lord. Amen. The peace of God that surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.