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Calvary Lutheran Church
Chandler, Arizona
Wednesday, April 2, 2025
Midweek 5

Psalm 51:7

Remove my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus:

Have you ever gotten a large ink stain on your hands? Depending on the ink, it can be very difficult to get off. When I was a vicar I had to run the bulletin off on a mimeograph machine. Maybe you remember those. You had a stencil that you would load onto a big drum that would spin around and apply ink to the paper. That ink was some of the hardest stuff to get off your hands! Back in the day brake cleaner was the only thing that came close to removing that stain.

Like mimeograph ink stains the hands, sin stains the heart. Unfortunately, brake cleaner cannot remove that horrible stain of sin. Only one thing removes it: the holy, precious blood of Christ shed for sinners on the cross. By faith in Jesus, which the Spirit graciously forms in our hearts, we receive the forgiveness of sins that Christ won through his innocent suffering and death. From beginning to end we find ourselves totally **Relying on God's Grace**.

We come into this world in desperate need of cleansing because we are dirty with sin from the very start. King David repeats that truth throughout Psalm 51 because it needs repeating. **"Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** If we aren't reminded every day that we're dirty with sin, we will easily forget how much we need our Savior's cleansing.

As proof of this, we need only look to the concise summary of God's holy will in the Ten Commandments. How often do you go down the list, commandment by commandment, and ask yourself how you've done at keeping each one? Maybe you have and didn't like the results of your examination. Maybe you haven't because you're afraid of what you'll discover. It is, however, a healthy spiritual exercise to do so regularly. Let's do so now:

"You shall have no other gods" (First Commandment). This one's easy, right? We know that we are to worship no one but the one true God. We must not do what the people of Israel did and worship a golden calf. Since we've never bent in reverence before a statue of wood or stone, we can check this one off as kept. That is, until we look a little more deeply. It turns out that God wants not only our outward worship but also that we be completely devoted to him and serve him with everything we do every moment of our lives. Total devotion would mean never breaking any commandment ever. So every sin is really a double sin. Not only are we breaking the commandment we're sinning against directly, but in doing so, we also are putting ourselves and our sinful desires ahead of what God would have us do. We're bowing down to ourselves in worship every time we sin.

"You shall not murder" (Fifth Commandment). I've never murdered anyone. I would venture to guess that nobody here has ever ended someone's life in cold blood. However, God's Word tells us, **"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him"** (1 John 3:15). That's scary! I've had hateful thoughts. You have too. We're murderers who have no eternal life remaining in us. We all deserve hell.

"You shall not commit adultery" (Sixth Commandment). King David trampled on this commandment when he slept with Bathsheba. I've never done that. I've never taken another man's wife into my bed. I imagine a lot of us could have that same attitude toward this commandment—that it simply doesn't apply to us. However, Jesus said, **"I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart"** (Matthew 5:28). Oh . . . boy . . . I've done that. . . . There is no room for any of us to say, "I have not broken the Sixth Commandment." We are all guilty.

That law of God says to you: You are guilty. You Have broken all of God's commandments. You deserve the punishment of the eternal fires of hell. The truth is that on your own you are stained. You are scarlet, crimson, the color of blood shed. While you may not have ever actually killed someone, your souls are stained red with the blood of Jesus because it was for *your* sin that the Godman had to die. **You** are responsible for his death! So am

I. David understood that about himself. That is why he implores God: **“Remove my sin with hyssop, and I will be clean. Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”**

Hyssop is a shrub that grows in the Middle East. Its oil has antiseptic properties, which is probably one reason why it’s referred to as a cleanser in this verse. King David saw sin for what it was—an infection. If an infection is not cleaned, it causes the body to rot. Eventually, if left untreated, an infection will turn to gangrene and the infected portion will have to be cut off. If the infection spreads throughout the body, it will kill the organism. Hyssop with its antiseptic properties would have been used to fight infections.

Like an infection, sin causes us to rot spiritually. If it’s not treated, it causes us to fall away from the Lord and die for all eternity. Just as God treated physical infection through hyssop, he treats spiritual infection through the hyssop of the gospel. By the message of forgiveness in Christ, God treats the deadly infection born in us. He cleanses us in Christ. He washes us. He makes us whiter than snow. In Isaiah 1:18 our Lord himself says: **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”**

If you are from up north, think about how absolutely beautiful it looks when all of the dead, brown grass, the gravel, the dirt, are covered with a pure, pristine blanket of snow. And that’s what God has done for us. He’s covered our filthy, dirty sins with a blanket of his righteousness. So we look perfect, pure, and holy before God, in spite of all the times we’ve made a mockery of worship by just going through the motions, in spite of the times we’ve thought that our gifts somehow earned God’s love, in spite of every one of our sins. Perfect. Sinless. Holy. White as snow. And this, not by any effort or sacrifice on *our* part, but entirely by *his* sacrifice for us.

We rely totally on God’s grace. That infection of sin has been removed from us is through the blood of Christ. The Savior from sin who was promised from the very beginning is the one with whom we walk to the cross each Lenten season. Jesus’ perfect life and innocent death paid for the sins of the entire world. On the day we were baptized, the Lord applied to us individually what Jesus had done for all. The Holy Spirit formed faith in our hearts, leading us to trust that in Christ all our sins have been forgiven. God made us clean in his sight. No longer are we dirty. No longer are we guilty. So don’t beat yourself up with guilty. It has been taken away. Don’t let Satan tell you that you are worthless Christian. God has cleansed you and cured you of all sin. You are clean. In Christ you are whiter than snow.

Thank the Lord that we have this opportunity each year to gather for worship and walk through the Passion History of our Savior. It is a blessing to hear again the suffering our Lord Jesus endured in our place as he carried our burden of sin. It is a privilege for us to see him—as gruesome as it may be to our human senses—beaten and scourged, spit on and mocked, and finally nailed to a cross and forsaken by God the Father as our substitute. In that suffering is our comfort. In that punishment is our hope. In those wounds are the grace of God on which we rely.

Yes, it is true that stains can be very difficult to get out. The spiritual stain of sin that we could never remove, God removed completely in the cleansing blood of Christ. The infection we could not heal, God healed perfectly in Christ. When we as God’s people recognize what he has done for us in Christ, we rejoice in the salvation that is ours and we rely entirely on God’s grace. Amen.