

Ash Wednesday (B)

February 17, 2021

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, Maryland

Readings: Psalm 51: 1-4,6-7, 10-13; John 9: 1-11

Grace, mercy and peace from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit — Amen

“Go wash” Jesus tells the blind man, after the disciples had been talking about him as if he wasn’t standing right there hearing it all. “Go wash,” Jesus tells the blind man. Wash off the mud but also all those years of condemning, hurtful, rejecting words and treatment. “Go wash,” Jesus says. Wash off all the stigma and judgements others laid upon you, wash off any doubt you had about God’s love for you. “Go wash.”

Maybe that would be a good Lenten theme — “Go wash,” Jesus says. There is much we all wish we could wash off from this past year — COVID, isolation, limitations, divisive rhetoric, racism, violence, the inability to put aside personal preferences for the sake and safety of the wider community. “Go wash” off what has been to get ready for what can be. “Go wash,” Jesus says so we can see ourselves through the eyes of God — which is both terrifying and healing and brings us into Lent.

The eyes of God see the things we’ve done wrong and the things we failed to do — and all our rationalizations and excuses just won’t wash. If that was all God saw when looking at us, fear and trembling would be all we’d know in God’s presence. Yet, when Jesus looked at the blind man, he didn’t see a score sheet of rights and wrongs... he didn’t have to first calculate if the man was worthy of his help. The same is true about us. Yes, God sees the failings and unfaithfulness, but that is not all God sees, that is not what defines us in God’s eyes.

God sees you and I as beloved children for whom God has perfect, boundless and eternal love. God sees us tied up, captive, blind, muddy, unable to free ourselves from those thoughts, words and actions that get in the way of loving the Lord, ourselves and one another. Our God has always wanted to save, free and heal us of what ails our lives and the world. So when we turn, return, repent, turn away, turn back home to repent again, what we will see in the eyes of God is indeed a sadness for the harm done and time wasted but even more brightly, more deeply we see the love of God that says you are forgiven, welcome home, go wash and we’ll celebrate.

We dare to take a turn, to take a step toward some soul searching each Lent. Not simply to confess our addiction to sugar, potato chips or soda but to take notice of what needs to be washed away from our thoughts, words and deeds, so that we can be more ready and able to love and serve our Lord and neighbor. And that place where water first met the, healing, forgiveness, and power of God’s love was at our Baptism. “Go wash” that

son or daughter in the waters of baptism. Let God's life-giving waters wash them from the fear and fatality of sin and death... let God's life-giving waters pour into them eternal life and love... let God's life-giving waters wash away any idea that they have to go through the roller coaster of life alone... let God's life-giving water grow them in faith, in a community and in holy servanthood so that their light will so shine before others that they will see your good words and give glory to your Father in heaven.

This year we begin our Lenten walk back at those cleansing, life-giving waters of our baptism. Martin Luther advised us to return to our baptism daily, to remember who we are and whose we are. In the water and the cross, we remember we are the beloved, forgiven, empowered, light of God sent to bless the world. This year — with all its challenges and unknowns — I ask us to take Luther's advice this Lent.

Jesus said, "Go wash." Here's where the mysterious soap comes in. Tonight or tomorrow morning, go stand in front of the mirror where you wash your face or brush your teeth each morning. Take the edge of the bar of soap and make a cross on the mirror so that you see it on the reflection of your forehead. If more than one of you share a bathroom mirror, let each person trace a cross that will show on their forehead each morning. We use soap because ashes were used to make soap and because at our baptism we were washed clean, made new in Christ, made beloved children of God forever. Leave that cross of ash and soap on the mirror all during Lent. Each time you look at that cross on your forehead in the mirror, say, "I am a baptized child of God, forever loved and forgiven." (Repeat several times) I'm going to put the words on a sticky note on my mirror to help me remember. "I am a baptized child of God, forever loved and forgiven." This is who we are. And that is who we remain, ever able to be washed clean by God's forgiveness and to try anew to be more fully the beloved children of God we were created to be. Which is always the Lenten path we walk with Jesus, our Savior and companion Amen.

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