



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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“Wrapped Up In Righteousness”

(Psalm 32:1-5)

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“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin” (Psalm 32:1-5).

COLLECT: Almighty and everlasting God, You sent Your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon Himself our flesh and to suffer death upon the cross. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of His great humility and patience and be made partakers of His resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

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We have a group here called the Prayer Shawl Ministry. They meet once a month to crochet or knit beautiful prayer shawls like this one for folks who are facing illness or loss. They are made with prayers and given with prayers. It’s a fun group, a multigenerational group, and I know their work is much appreciated. When you’re sick or in some way broken, it’s really nice to have a physical reminder that God’s people are praying for you. But this group doesn’t just sit and knit and pray. They also teach one another new tricks of the trade and share stories and laugh and sometimes refer to themselves as “The Happy Hookers.”

This group has also been making these baptismal shawls. They are bright white, and we use them in the liturgy of Holy Baptism. The acolyte helps me swaddle the infant in white, and then the words: “Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ . . .” (Lutheran Service Book, p. 271).

Imagine . . . being covered with Christ’s righteousness so that we can stand without fear before the judgment

seat of Christ. What a gift! When you were baptized, Christ and his righteousness became your gown. In Galatians 3 Paul wrote, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (v. 27). “Christ himself is our garment” said Martin Luther (AE 26:353). He covers over the filth and crud of our sin with the purity of his righteousness, so on the Last Day, when God our Judge looks at us, he doesn’t see the sin. He sees his Son Jesus, and the innocence and righteousness Jesus won for us on the cross.

When our kids were babies, one of the things I loved to do was swaddle them. The nurse said, “Make it tight. It’s soothing to newborns and makes them feel like they’re still in the womb.” So I did and grew proud of my swaddling skills. I can swaddle with the best of them. By the time I was done my kids had more wiggle room in the womb than they did in my swaddle. My goal was to be able to pick them up by the cloth with two fingers without them falling out. That was a good swaddle. I think of that bright white tight wrap whenever I read from our text, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

King David wrote that and he would know, wouldn’t he, what a blessing it is to have your sin covered? Remember his story? He had that affair with Bathsheba. She became pregnant. It would be a royal scandal, so he tried to cover it over himself with lies and deceptions. Nothing worked. The thing snowballed, got out of control, and before long Uriah, (Bathsheba’s husband) a good man, lies dead on the field. It seems as if David’s cover-up is going to work. Chalk another one up for the rich and powerful! But the chapter ends with a hint that the story isn’t over. “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” Translate that: stay tuned. There’s more to come. David has covered over his sin, but the Lord has not. David’s guilt comes through in this psalm of his: “When I kept silent” he writes, that is, when I refused to confess my sins to the Lord . . . when I kept silent, my bones wasted away.”

You see, the ancient Hebrews believed that sin and guilt impact the entire person . . . not just the soul or spirit or conscience, but also the body, the bones, the energy, the mood, the posture. Already 3,000 years ago, they had this holistic approach that said what is good for the soul is also good for the body, and what is bad for the soul is bad for the body. Psalm 38, “There is no health in my bones because of my sin.”

We can learn from that. If you try to cover over your sin in the usual ways (deceptions, denials, lies, minimalizing it and the like) if you try to cover over sin with man’s usual methods, it’s going to have an impact on who you are. It’s going to expose itself in other ways. Unless the Lamb of God takes away our sin, there’s no where for it to go. It sticks, or pops up in other ways. It’s like the game of “Whac – a –Mole”. Knock down the guilt over here, and it pops up over there in the form of fatigue or stress, headaches or ulcers, hypertension, heart disease . . . maybe in the form of overeating, or addiction or divorce. Ultimately, sin always ends with death. What is bad for the soul is bad for the body. Because of sin, the bones literally waste away. Dust to dust.

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David discovered it’s better by far to seek the Lord’s forgiveness and let him wash us clean. Finally “I acknowledged my sin to you” he writes, “and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. . . “Blessed is the one whose sin is covered.” John wrote, “the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7). Again, think of being swaddled in something bright white. “Come, now, let us reason together” says the Lord in Isaiah. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool” (1:18), the unspoken words being, “if you only let me cover them with my righteousness.”

In our Gospel lesson a King is preparing a wedding celebration for his son. He sends his servants out with invitations, but curiously, those invited are not interested.

Can you imagine, being invited to a King's feast and saying, "Eh . . . not interested." Whenever a parable departs from reality like this, it's as if Jesus is saying, "Take notice here. This is important." Apparently he thinks many people are even now declining an invitation they really shouldn't decline. In any case, the king is taken aback, but doesn't give up. He sends more servants out. Again, those whom they invite pay no attention. After all they have work to do! One goes to his field, another to his business. Some seized the king's servants, mistreated them, even killed them. His servants having been mistreated and killed, the king is enraged and he sends out his troops who take care of those murderous scoundrels.

But there's still this wedding, and the hall still has lots of room in it. So the King sends his servants out yet again and tells them to invite everyone they can find, both the bad and good. They do, and the hall is filled with happy, festive people.

It's a wonderful parable about grace, because both the bad and the good are invited, and the emphasis is on the word "bad." Imagine, even bad people, wicked people invited to rub elbows with the King at the wedding feast of his Son. That's grace. That's mercy.

Some time ago a single felon leaked through the secret service and rode an elevator with the president. It got a lot of publicity. How could this happen? But in the parable the King is intent on filling the wedding hall with anyone his servants can find, with felons and freaks, oddballs and saints and sinners.

But the parable isn't over just yet. You see there's this fellow who crashes the party without the appropriate wedding clothes. At the time, you didn't dare go to a wedding without getting dressed up in a festive wedding garment, and there's some indication that at royal weddings the King provided these garments. However, this fellow is not wearing a wedding garment. I suppose he thinks he doesn't need one. I suppose he's thinking his t-shirt and dirty jeans are just fine. The King will have to learn to cope.

So he goes in humming to himself, “I Did it My Way”, and when the King sees this, he asks the man, “Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?” The man has no answer. The next sentence surprises me every time I read it. This man is treated as harshly as anyone in the Bible. “Tie him hand and foot” the King says, “and cast him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt. 22). The guy is thrown into hell for the sin of being underdressed at a wedding. The parable is departing from reality, right? Take notice then. This is important.” Don’t begin to think this is about wearing dress shoes to church rather than sneakers. No, it’s far more important than that.

Ask yourself, what is it about this wedding garment that’s so special? What else can it be other than Christ’s righteousness and innocence and holiness? That’s what gets us into the great wedding feast in heaven, not our own good works but the forgiveness Christ won for us on the cross. This man felt no need to be covered with Christ’s forgiveness and innocence. He felt his own garments were good enough.

So many people think like this. “I ain’t perfect” they say, “but I’m pretty good.” Only trouble is pretty good isn’t good enough. “Be perfect” Jesus said, “even as the Lord your God is perfect” (Mt. 5:48). And Isaiah wrote, “All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” On the basis of your own righteousness, you’re not going to make the cut. You need something more. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul asks, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor. 6:9). Our only hope, then, is to be covered over with Christ’s own righteousness.

Confirmands, you’re wearing white. It’s not because you’re graduating. And heaven knows it’s not because you’re so sweet, innocent and pure. If the color of our gowns were a measure of our own moral righteousness, we’d all look like a class of young wizards straight out of Hogwarts, Slytherin House, and I’d look like Professor Snape. But you’re wearing white as a sign that you are

baptized children of the Heavenly Father. In Holy Baptism, you were wrapped up tight in Christ's own righteousness. We need that fabric more than any other! This is why 1 Peter 3 says, very simply, "Baptism now saves you" (v. 21). This is why Jesus himself said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:16). This is why Paul wrote, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (v. 3:27). "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). This is why, back in our psalm, David writes, "Blessed is the one whose sin is covered."

We illustrate this truth at the other end of the Christian life as well. Right at the start of the funeral service, the casket is closed, the family is seated, and a funeral pall is quietly placed over the casket, a simple white garment with a golden cross running the length, covering over the casket and, more importantly, the one within, the arms of the cross wrapping themselves around the deceased. Then the pastor says, "In Holy Baptism Jim was clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covered all his sin.

It looks something like a chrysalis or cocoon with the little sparkles of gold thread woven in, and well it should, because baptism transforms us . . . as radically as a caterpillar being transformed into a butterfly. Paul writes, "We were buried with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His" (Rom. 6:3-5).

That sounds like happy news to me. That sounds like sweet, sweet Gospel, for you've been baptized. You've been covered. You've put on Christ as a garment. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Thanks be to God. Amen.

