

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Palm Sunday / Sunday of the Passion A
April 5, 2020
Matthew 27:24-25

Washing Your Hands Is Not Enough

So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:24-25 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

A dangerous disease threatens us. We're told to stay at home and away from others so we won't get infected or spread it to others. But social distancing was not practiced when Jesus entered Jerusalem that day. No, there were crowds following Jesus, there were crowds coming out to greet Him, and there was a smaller crowd watching the whole thing. And as the crowds shouted their "Hosannas!" with unmasked faces, they didn't realize the disease they most needed saving from.

Yet, those shouts of acclamation soon became shouts of condemnation. "Hosanna" gave way to "Crucify Him!" So if the passion of our Lord is about anything at all, it's about blood. Blood from the scourging and whipping. Blood from His head where a crown of thorns had been placed. Blood from His hands and His feet as He was nailed to the cross. Blood (and water) from His side as He was pierced with a spear. Yes, our Lord's passion and crucifixion were all about blood. More than that, it was all about the shedding of *innocent* blood.

Now Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. Three times he declared that Jesus was not worthy of death (Luke 23:4, 14, 22). But when Jesus would not defend Himself, Pilate gave in to the Sanhedrin's desire and turned Him over to be crucified. Yet, wanting to justify himself, Pilate washed his hands and declared that he was "innocent of this man's blood." But his washing and his declaring such did not make it so. He was absolutely guilty of Jesus' blood. After all, knowing Jesus was innocent, he turned Him over to his soldiers to beat and to scourge. He gave Jesus over to the desires of the Jews to be crucified. Nothing he did could alleviate his guilt, no matter what he may have thought.

Yet, the people said, "His blood be on us and on our children." Thus they claimed responsibility and guilt for Jesus' death and called down a curse upon themselves. Yet, nowhere does God agree with them. Nowhere does God say, "Ok. You asked for it. You've got it."

So, what does this have to do with us? We wouldn't dream of calling down such guilt upon ourselves or think we could alleviate our guilt simply by washing our hands. After all, washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds might get rid of germs, it might even get rid of blood, but it won't get rid of guilt. So, until we get a real solution, and I'm not talking hand sanitizer, our guilt remains. Nothing we do can change that.

After all, Christ's blood is on us and on our children. We are as guilty as Pilate and those who called for Jesus' death. Because we are born in sin, we are God's enemies. Because of our sin, original sin and actual sins, we are guilty of the death of Christ. Our sin led to His crucifixion. Thus, we deserve God's vengeance and wrath in all its horrible power.

Yet, by the mercy of Almighty God, He does not execute that vengeance on us. He does not give us what we deserve. Instead He poured out His vengeance on His beloved Son. He unleashed the fullness of His fury over sin on Jesus as He hung on the cross. That's why the crucifixion is so terrible. It's there that we see what we deserve. It's there that we see what our sin caused. It's there that we see the wrath of God in all its horror.

Yet, it's by the blood of Christ shed on that cross that we are cleansed of our sin. St. Paul tells us: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Much more then, having now been justified *by His blood,* we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (Rom. 5:8-9). “In Him we have redemption *through His blood,* the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace . . .” (Eph. 1:7). “He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption *through His blood,* the forgiveness of sins.” (Col. 1:13-14). “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, . . . having made peace *through the blood* of His cross.” (Col. 1:19-20).

As, at the time of the Exodus the Israelites were saved from death by the blood on the doorposts, so we are saved by the blood on the doorpost of the cross. But this isn't just any blood. It's the blood of the perfect, spotless Lamb of God. That's why “the blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7).

What washing with soap and water for 20 seconds can never do, Jesus' blood does. In the waters of Baptism our sins are washed away and we are covered in Christ's blood. He has “loved us and washed us from our sins *in His own blood.*” (Rev. 1:5). Furthermore, we have been clothed in the robe of Christ's righteousness. We too have been joined to the heavenly throng holding palm branches in their hands who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:14). Through no effort of our own, our guilt is removed and we are now innocent before God. We are cleansed by the blood of Christ and covered in it.

Indeed, Jesus' blood is on us and on our children. Through the forgiveness of sins, delivered in all its forms - Baptism, Absolution, the Supper - we are covered in blood, Christ's blood. That blood shed in death cleanses us of all sins and gives us life - now and forevermore.

What a blessing to be washed in the blood of Jesus! God grant that that blood be on us and on our children now and forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.