

2 September 2012  
Pentecost 14

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“Truly Clean and Holy”

Text: Mark 7:14-23; Ephesians 6:10-20; Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Clean is in the eye of the beholder. Parents have different standards than children, and women have different standards than men. That’s why children cannot understand why under the bed and into the closet is not considered “clean” by their parents. It’s why when parents ask their children “*Did you wash your hands?*” the next question is: “*With soap?*” It’s why men look around and think “*Not bad*” while their wives follow them into the room with a bucket of cleaning supplies and rubber gloves on their hands! You all know it’s true . . .

The words from Jesus we heard today are a continuation of His dispute with the Scribes and Pharisees from last week. And if there was *anybody* who looked, if there was anybody men, women, *and* children could all look at and agree was spiritually clean, it was the Scribes and Pharisees. They were super dedicated. They followed all those rules and regulations in the Old Testament, and even the more that had grown out of them – the traditions of the elders (as we heard last week) – what you could and could not touch, what you could and could not eat, how and what to wash . . . all those things we read and think: *How on earth could you follow all that?* They did. They were the ones with the buckets of spiritual cleaning supplies . . .

And yet in their hearts was all those awful things Jesus mentioned. Because in their hearts – even as they were accusing the disciples of being defiled – all that uncleanness was already percolating and plotting Jesus’ crucifixion.

We see the same thing in our world today, whenever another shooting happens in a movie theatre or school or college or shopping center. Sometimes there were signs that something was wrong, but often times the news is filled with interviews about how the person seemed so normal, so good, so clean, and how shocking and surprising that such an awful thing could come out of such a good, clean-cut person, who smiles and is so friendly, who loves animals and helps little old ladies across the street.

And then there’s all the uncleanness in our hearts. The uncleanness that comes

spewing out when someone cuts you off in traffic, or you don't get what you want or think you deserve, or when you feel slighted or insulted by someone, the uncleanness that comes out when we know we can do something and get away with it. The thoughts that shouldn't be there, the murder of someone's reputation, the pride that wants others to change for me instead of me changing or helping them, the jealousy. The presumption of guilt when it comes to others but the presumption of innocence when it comes to me. The impatience, the condescending, the *get out of my way*. It's all in there and more, isn't it? And while it might surprise the person next to you if they knew all that was percolating in your heart, sometimes it even surprises us what comes out, the shameful sins and impulses deep down.

But Jesus is not surprised. It's why He came. And not with gloves on, to protect Himself from our sins; but in our flesh and blood. And He came to fill not a bucket, but to fill fonts and chalices and pulpits with His blood to clean us. To clean us from the inside out. That in every baptism, every communion, every sermon and absolution, the Holy Spirit do His cleansing work and wash away the guilt of our sins. All of them. None hidden from His sight or too deep for his cleansing. Sometimes we may wish God didn't know all our sins, but if He didn't, how could we know they are all forgiven? But if He knows them, He died for them. If He knows them, He took them upon Himself and paid for them. If He knows them, He forgives them. From the littlest of them to the most shameful of them. All of them.

For you see, on the cross, the anti-Scribes and Pharisees, the anti-you and me takes place. For there, the One who was completely clean and pure on the inside, the One who knew no sin, the One whose heart percolated only love and life, not only looked like sin, looked like the criminal we are, but *became* sin. For you. All that's inside you is outside Christ on the cross, your shame showing His love, that His blood shed there now fill our eyes and ears and mouths and hearts and make you holy. His *I forgive you* filling us with faith and giving us the deep cleaning that we need. The deep cleaning we can get nowhere else.

And so because of the cross things are now different for you. The cleansing of Jesus' death and reversal of death in His resurrection now means a new reality for you. Because though at the beginning of this sermon I talked about how sin is hidden in our hearts even though we may look good on the outside, there is a way that sin is displayed outwardly in our lives, even though we are now forgiven and clean in our hearts. And that is in death and disease and injury and misfortune; our bodies breaking down, wearing out, and constantly under assault by the evil one.

Just this week, one of our shut-ins, Lorena, was diagnosed with ALS – Lou Gehrig's disease. Another one of you was in a car accident and injured. Friends are near death, more are diagnosed with cancer and other diseases, many still can't find

jobs, financial difficulties abound, and then we saw on the news another hurricane – people flooded *again*, homeless *again*, destruction and devastation *again*. And when these things happen, we are tempted to think that God isn't taking care of us, or even that He is against us. And if all we had to judge by was what is in our hearts . . . we would conclude that's right; that's true. We call ourselves children of God, but why then, many wonder – why then is all this happening to me?

But just as we are surprised by the evil that comes out of clean-looking folks, so we are surprised at this truth – that even though this is what we see on the outside, you *are* clean, you *are* forgiven, you, dear sinner, *are* a child of God. That is the truth. That is the truth of our new reality baptized into Christ and His forgiveness. The reversal of Christ's resurrection now means a reversal for us. A wonderful reversal, that even though we die, yet shall we live. For we are His, bought with a price; bought and cleansed by His blood.

Now satan will do everything He can to make you forget that. To reverse that thinking and make you think that if everything's good on the outside you must be good on the inside, or that if everything's bad on the outside you must be bad on the inside. It kind of makes sense. But it's not the truth. Christ has changed everything for you.

That's why **St. Paul** exhorts us today to put on the whole armor of God, the defensive armor of God's Word and truth and forgiveness. That these assaults of satan, his lies and deceits, not penetrate our hearts and faith. And that's why **Moses** told us to make sure we teach our children, and our children's children – to make sure they know the truth. The truth of our sin and the truth of Jesus' forgiveness. Because the world is filled with other messages and other truths that maybe even seem to make sense, but in the end lead us away from our Saviour. And, **St. Paul** says, pray. Pray for others who are under attack. Pray for those who do not know the truth. Pray that the Word and Spirit and blood of our Saviour would cleanse all people and bring all to faith. Pray – for the armor is our defense, but prayer is part of our offense.

And so we prayed this morning in the Introit: ***Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin . . . Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*** We prayed that, we asked for that, for this is the *Lord's* work. Only He can do it. Only He can create something out of nothing, can create a child of God from sinners like us. And so we come back here every week to pray for and receive His forgiveness. We go to Him every day to pray for and receive His forgiveness. And He does. Forgiving and cleansing us, restoring us, and *renewing* us. That baptized into Christ, what is inside Christ may show itself outside of us.

Yes, for we pray for that too. ***Cleanse me and create in me a clean heart, O God,*** but also ***renew a right spirit within me.*** A right spirit. That believes right, that thinks right, that desires right, that speaks right and acts right – in faith toward God and love toward one another. Only He can do that too. And He does. He promised. Not that we'll be perfect – you know that will never happen this side of eternity. But that we will, in faith, always turn to Him in every need, trusting in His Word, His love, and His forgiveness, no matter what things look like, no matter how we feel.

That when misfortune and trouble comes, When the outside looks terrible, when we're under the assault of the evil one, when doubts arise, and even when faced with death, we confess God's Word; we confess God's truth; we confess (as we will sing at the end of the service today [LSB #594]):

*God's own child, I gladly say it: I am baptized into Christ (v. 1).*

*Sin disturb my soul no longer: I am baptized into Christ (v. 2).*

*Satan, hear this proclamation: I am baptized into Christ (v. 3).*

*Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ (v. 4).*

*I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise (v. 5)!*

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.