

3 March 2021
Lent 2 Midweek

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Covered”

Text: Genesis 3:1-21; Galatians 3:23-29; John 19:1-5, 23-24

Psalm 32

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

As we hold the church’s jewel of forgiveness up this week to consider its beauty, the facet of forgiveness that strikes our eyes and ears tonight is *covered*. Last week, the forgiveness of our sins was their cleansing, or washing. Tonight, it is that they are covered.

Which, maybe, sounds odd. For if your sins are cleansed, if they are washed away, *why do they also need to be covered?*

Well, because while God really and truly has washed away your sin, and that baptismal washing, as we noted last week, is real and true and 100% . . . the fact is that it is not quite so in our hearts and minds. God doesn’t see the sin, but we still do. We believe the forgiveness, but we know what we’ve done. And very often, along with that, comes feelings of shame and unworthiness and fear. Even if the people around you know nothing about what you’ve done, the depths to which you’ve fallen, and you look like such a fine Christian . . . *you* know. And fear that they might know . . . And if they find out, what then?

So your sin - even though you know it’s forgiven by God, and you believe that; even though you’ve been washed and God doesn’t see it anymore - it can still seem like a scarlet letter on you. And all you want to do, like Adam and Eve, is cover it up. They used fig leaves. But what do you use?

If it was a stain on our shirt, we could cover it up with a sweater or a jacket. If it was a stain on the carpet, cover it with an throw rug, or a piece of furniture. But the stain of sin on us . . . we cover it with excuses, or denials. Nothing to see here! But whenever someone says that, you know that there IS, in fact, something to see! If there really is nothing to see, then let everyone look. But if you don’t want people to look behind the curtain, why not? What are you covering up? And the faster we deny, the more certain you can be that there’s something there. Like, when you walk into the room and the laptop slams shut! What were you looking at? Nothing. Uh huh.

Satan loves to keep bringing your sin back to your mind, that you live in such fear and

uncertainty and shame. And maybe even begin to doubt God's washing and cleansing. That's why God continues to dump your baptismal water on you with His Absolution. Maybe you've seen this scene: the Fire Department has put out a house fire, but keeps pumping water on it. Why? Because they know there is still fire you cannot see, smoldering in the wreckage. So, too, with our sin. We've been washed and cleansed in baptism, we might look good on the outside, but what's smoldering inside? What shame do you still feel? What unworthiness is gnawing away at you? What sin that you fear could ignite again?

So God continues to dump His water on us. That we not doubt, but have peace and relief. And we need that every day.

But not only that. Our good and gracious Lord **also covers us**. Not because His washing isn't 100%, but because He knows us. He knows our doubts and fears and worries. He understands what we need. And He provides. That we be both clean AND covered. For as David said, and as we sang tonight: ***Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.***

Now, there's a great difference between OUR covering the stains of our sins and GOD covering us. Maybe we succeed on our own for a while. Maybe we get away with something. But consider Adam and Eve again, who clothed themselves with fig leaves. What happens to a leaf after you pick it? It very quickly dries up and crumbles. And then you have to do it over and over and over again. Always uncertain, always in dread that you'll be uncovered and revealed.

So God clothed His children. He didn't make them live like that. He covered them with garments of skin. Which was both a reminder of their sin, but also a relief from their sin. A reminder of forgiveness, that their Father had not rejected them, and a reminder of His love in continuing to care for them. But a reminder, too, of the wages of sin. That because of their sin, something had to die. It wasn't them. Not yet, anyway. Their Father had provided a substitute.

And for you. Because of your sin, to cover you, not an animal, but the very Son of God would die. And so Scripture says that not only that you are washed and forgiven in the blood of Christ, but as we heard tonight, that ***as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. You are clothed with Christ.*** God no longer sees you as the sinner; when He look at you, He sees Christ. He sees a dearly loved child. Your sin is forgiven AND your shame is covered.

So for us, it is not the death of an animal, but the death of Jesus on the cross that is both a reminder of our sin and also a relief from our sin. A reminder of our forgiveness, that our Father has not rejected us, and also a reminder of His love in continuing to care for us. That our Father has provided a substitute for us. To cover our shame.

And we heard tonight that when that happened, when Jesus was crucified for us, He was clothed first with a crown of thorns and a purple robe. The thorns that grew because of our sin, and the purple robe mocking Him as a pretend king - just as Adam and Eve tried to be like God. But then they took these off of Jesus, along with all His other clothing, dividing them up, casting lots for the tunic. And when Jesus was crucified, He hung there naked.

That's worthy of some consideration by us tonight . . . how Jesus has traded places with us. The Father covering His children's sin, but how Jesus is not *really* unclothed, but rather *clothed with our sin and nakedness*. The Romans did that for humiliation and shame, yet Jesus is not ashamed. If we are uncovered . . . yes, shame; sin. But Jesus is uncovered in love. And covers us with that love. With Himself. So that we have a new identity. Not sinner, but son. Child of God.

Think about all the places in Scripture where this is spoken. Jesus covers and protects of all kinds of sinners from the wrath of others with His forgiveness and love. Christians are spoken of as those clothed in white robes. Or, as we sang in the opening hymn tonight: *Comfort, comfort my people. How? Tell her that her sins I cover And her warfare now is over* (LSB #347 v. 1). Maybe it seemed a little strange to sing an Advent hymn in Lent. But Lent is the fulfillment of Advent. The adventing one, the coming one, here, and ascending the cross for us. To fulfill all His words and promises. To cover us with His forgiveness and love.

Or, this is how another hymn puts it, which we will sing a few weeks from now:

*Lord, when Your glory I shall see And taste Your kingdom's pleasure,
Your blood my royal robe shall be, My joy beyond all measure!
When I appear before Your throne, Your righteousness shall be my crown;
With these I need not hide me. And there, in garments richly wrought,
As Your own bride we shall be brought To stand in joy beside You* (LSB #438 v. 4).

Royal robes. Garments richly wrought. No hiding. *Covered*. By Christ. With Christ. Just what we need. Another beautiful facet of forgiveness.

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