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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
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Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
March 26, 2014
4th Midweek Lent

Scripture Lessons: Psalm 62 Passion: Before Pontius Pilate
Hymns: 149; 145; 141; 558

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Mathew 27:24-25

When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a
tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the
multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person.
You see to it." 25 And all the people answered and said, "His
blood be on us and on our children." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified Savior, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: *Remarkable incidents from Jesus' Passion*

This evening's incident that has found its way into culture time and
again. Shakespeare used this scene in one of his plays. There are
figures of speech in English that find their source in the incident
before us this evening. People are advised to "wash their hands of
the entire business" when things are going bad, and for them it
would be ill advised to stay involved. But there was something
more involved. There is a matter of guilt and culpability. And so
the Spirit would teach us of man's futile attempts at self-
justification with --

THEME: Pilate's Futile Hand Washing.

Pilate knew he was in the wrong. Pilate knew that this was a bad deal. Pilate knew that this was going to leave its mark on him. He didn't want to be associated with the death of Jesus. So we have the incident before us with Pilate pouring water in a basin and his symbolic –

I Washing Away of the Filth.

There is filth that you can see and then there is filth that you cannot see. Often times it is the filth that you cannot see that is far more dangerous than the filth that you can see. There is a filth that contaminates the body, and then there is a filth that contaminates the soul. A little soap and water can remove dirt from one's hands, but what about the soul?

Pilate's washing was a public declaration of his own innocence in the death of Jesus. **“I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it.”** However, simply because an individual claims innocence doesn't make it so. It has been said that our prisons are full of innocent people. Almost everyone in prison claims that they are not guilty. Some few may be correct. Regrettably, our justice system is not perfect. However, the vast majority of those who are incarcerated have been incarcerated for a reason. They are guilty of crimes against society. All their protests to the contrary don't change the facts. All claims of innocence don't remove the guilt that is theirs for the crimes that they have done.

So it was also with Pontius Pilate. Making a big show of washing his hands and proclaiming his own innocence did not change anything. It did not justify Pilate, or change the fact that it was Pilate that ordered that Jesus be crucified. It was Pilate who had repeatedly declared that Jesus was innocent of all charges that sentenced Jesus to death. It was Pilate that was guilty of a gross miscarriage of justice that early Friday morning, and so Pilate was morally culpable for the death of Jesus Christ our Lord.

His hand washing and self-justification was not only ineffective, it was a farce. Oh, it may have made him feel better. It may have made a statement concerning the guilt of the leaders of the Jews and the assembled mob gathered outside of Pilate's palace, but it didn't remove any guilty stains from Pilate.

And so it is yet today. People are very adroit at rationalizing away their own guilt and culpability when it comes to one's own sin. We see that it was really someone else's fault. We like to blame someone that was there with us who pressured me into sin, just as Pilate felt pressured to give in to the will of the Jews. They had used lies and deception and political innuendo, basically every trick in the book, to get Pilate to sin. So if we are lured into sin, or pressured into sin, or enticed into sin, or tricked into sin, does that alleviate our guilt? Can we feel washed clean? No. Claims that we may make that we are better people than that, or that we have done a lot of good besides our little misstep, or that there were extenuating circumstances, are all as futile and senseless as Pilate washing his hands declaring himself free from guilt.

And what of the assembled crowd? Listen to their callous reply. **“His blood be on us and on our children.”** In their blood lust, (How else could one describe this crazed mob action?) they were more than ready to accept responsibility for the death of Jesus. They called down upon themselves the guilt and the judgment that should go with the crime. But did they have any idea what that involved? Did they have grasp of the seriousness of the matter before them? Any sin, indeed every sin is a rebellion against God. As such it brings with it the sentence of eternal death, the separation of both soul and body from God forever. But God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and ready, even eager to forgive. And so He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might have forgiveness and grace and life in Him. And it was this grace that they spurned and despised as they called for Jesus to be crucified.

Judgment would come upon them as a people and nation when the Romans would destroy Jerusalem and so very many of the people would perish. But final judgment is reserved for God, and again because of the hardness of their hearts, having been misled into impenitence by their spiritual leaders, many will perish.

One might conclude with the statement that it was so silly of Pilate to think that a simple washing with water could wash his guilt away. One might think it foolish that the people of the Jews seemed to have bought into Pilate's self-justification in his little ritual of washing, and that is all true of that washing. Isn't it amazing that the Spirit has revealed to us –

II. An Effective Washing with Water.

There is a washing, and it is a washing with water, but a washing that is connected to Jesus that does wash the poison and contamination and guilt of sin away. It is that washing of baptism which John the Baptist performed and Jesus commanded. Paul wrote of it in –

Titus 3:4-6 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, ⁵ not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

The kindness and love of God appeared to us in the person of Jesus Christ who came to take our sins away. He shed His blood for us upon the cross, and it is the power of that sacrifice that makes the washing of baptism the wonder of grace that it is for each and every one of us. It is the “Washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” that has sanctified and cleansed us from all sin, and from guilt and condemnation.

By the Spirit we have been led, not to dodge our guilt or to deny our sin, but to come to the Lord in penitence and faith, and the Lord assures us that –

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We aren't able to wash our own sins away, but Jesus can, and Jesus has, for we are also taught this glorious truth:

1 John 1:7 “The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

This washing in the blood of Christ is the only effective purification for sin, and indeed it removes every stain, for **“though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow”** (Isaiah 1:18). You are washed clean. God Himself in heaven above has declared you to be innocent of all guilt.

As futile and even foolish as Pilate’s washing was, there is a washing that is effective, and you have been washed and made clean.

TLH 157:1-2

“There is a fountain filled with blood Drawn from Immanuel’s
veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood Lose all their guilty stains

“The dying thief rejoiced to see That fountain in his day,
And there have I as vile as he, Washed all my sins away.”

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.