

"New and Clean"

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

May the cross of Christ lead you to grieve over the evil of your sins, but may that same cross fill you with unreserved joy that also your own personal sins there found full and complete forgiveness. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Strength is good, weakness is bad, right? Not always. God once told Paul that, in his case, weak was better. God pointed out to Paul that when God accomplishes something through a powerful and impressive human being, it is difficult for others to credit God rather than man. The opposite is also true. Great things accomplished through the humble, feeble efforts of a weak and unimpressive human being naturally lead those who witness such events to search out a different target for their praise, hopefully eventually giving credit to God, where credit is always due.

The concept of power itself is actually rather interesting when you stop to think about it. So many different kinds of power, but really only one source. Think of it. Military power, political power, electric power, coal power, nuclear power, people power, horse power, man power – all are different forms of power, all refer to some means by which things get done, but all are traced back always and only to God himself. So Jesus once said to Pilate: **"You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above."** Again just prior to his ascension: **"All power has been given to me in heaven and in earth."** From Peter: **His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.** Finally, from Paul: **For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.** (Colossians 1:16)

Impressive, isn't it. So many different kinds of power, yet all God's. God the source, and to God alone belong the credit and the glory. With this as our background you may find it a bit strange that of all the different powers that belong to God, this morning we will talk about *cleaning power*.

I'm guessing you've seen ads for products that boast of "cleaning power." The subtle implication is that the product itself will do most of the work of getting something really clean, sparing the person who uses that product from at least some of the effort that would otherwise have to be invested.

This morning we seek to give God the glory and credit also for his cleaning power, which we will soon discover is immeasurably more impressive than we might first imagine. In fact this morning we will focus on God's ability to do something nearly impossible – to make a human being who is shot through with sin, death and corruption both new and clean. To learn more we seek to avail ourselves of the power of God's Word, this morning found recorded in the Book of Second Corinthians, the 5th Chapter:

^{ESV} 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸ All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

These are God's words - the means of grace, the means to create and preserve saving faith in our hearts, and the means to instill in us Godly wisdom and contentment. Here we also find the power that preserves that good thing that has been created in us, our saving faith. Desiring not only to be filled and preserved in the faith, but also to learn to be fully satisfied with our God's will for our lives, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"** Amen.

Clearly if we are going to talk about "new and clean," as the sermon title indicates, we need to first establish the need. In other words, we need to come to terms with the fact that, apart from Jesus Christ, we are naturally the exact opposite of new and clean. We are, to put it bluntly, old and dirty.

In fact this is exactly the sort of insight or reality we need to acknowledge if we are to have any chance at all of truly appreciating both the amazing miracle that God has performed in us, and the need for the sacrifice that he provided. This is the sort of honest evaluation that will prevent Jesus from becoming tedious - something less than he should be in our lives. The first thing we need to acknowledge is that in

me, that is, in my flesh, dwells *no good thing* – which is exactly why my God had to cleanse me.

As simple as this sounds, learning to recognize the depth of our depravity and unworthiness is nonetheless rather difficult to actually do well. We can say the right things easily enough – *"I am unclean and undeserving"* – but it is infinitely more difficult to fully and honestly embrace just how profoundly true those words really are. While we disparage the "entitlement mentality" in our culture, an honest evaluation tells us that you and I have more than our fair share. That's what makes it so difficult to really accept the truth that you and I were once without any redeeming characteristics or attributes of any kind, in God's sight. We were totally, completely filthy with sin.

While we sort of get the concept of spiritual filth, what takes a bit more work is the truth that we were also "old" in his sight. A change to "new and clean," again, implies that our previous condition was both dirty *and old*. So what exactly does that mean?

The godless imagine that their "cutting edge" thoughts in the areas of morality, spirituality, and human interaction are actually new and different. Fresh and avant-garde. They aren't. They're retreads, hand-me-downs, recycled trash. Others have had the same perverse thoughts before. Remember how Solomon once wallowed in the sewer of cutting edge immorality? For all of his experimentation, what conclusion did he reach? ***"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun."*** Ecclesiastes 1:9

Satan, remember, is the ultimate salesman. He loves to dress up sin as something new and exciting – something you really, really need and can't imagine doing without. His goal is to style sin as something clean, fresh, and desirable. The reality is that what he is peddling is just dirty, and old, and loathsome. No matter how tantalizing and appealing the presentation, the reality of sin is that it is always and only just old filth, disgusting in the eyes of our Creator God in every conceivable way.

Even our natural ideas on how to be saved were old. All amounted to nothing more than some sort of "cleaned up" work-righteousness and a rejection of Jesus Christ. Far from new, everything that comes from man always points back to "self" and our own goodness as the means to pay for our salvation.

This was the natural and universal state of me, you, and every other human being ever born. This is what Christ came to save, and it gives us a

new appreciation for the miraculous power he demonstrated to make us new and clean.

Our text, in fact, describes a whole different state of heart and mind that has been given to us, a whole different world, separate and distinct from that of the godless. It describes an existence that is infinitely more lofty and noble. Our text not only pictures this sinful world accurately, it also seeks to reawaken in us the accurate recognition and appreciation of what is truly valuable on this earth. Our text offers us a renewed appreciation for the true power of God that has been placed at our disposal – the power of God to cleanse sinful human beings like us and to transform us into something noble and holy in his sight.

Our text uses these words to teach us of God's transforming power: ***"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."*** Again, these words cannot mean all that they should to us until we come to understand what the Holy Spirit means here by the ***"old things"*** that ***"have passed away."*** You will have to do some work on your own here to gain the full import of this divine message. It is as if God has opened a huge dumpster right there in front of you and has invited you to dump in anything and everything from your past that is evil, everything that causes you shame or guilt. (You will have to find your own dumpster here, by the way. Mine is full.)

Consider the reality of just what is here offered to us. ***"Old things passed away"*** and ***"all things have become new"*** is an incredibly powerful and comforting message. All of the horrible decisions of your past, all of the lust, the bad language, the materialism, the infidelity and inconsistency, the lies, the greed, the pride – all gets dumped in and hauled off to the cross, where Jesus took all of that filth *upon himself*. Understand here that God the Father didn't just write all this sin off as some sort of bad debt for which payment would never, could never, be received. All of our filth was poured into Jesus Christ. When God the Father looked at his Son hanging on the cross he turned away from him. Why? Because at that moment Jesus was filthy with our sin. Our text revealed the true nature of what happened there with these amazing words: ***"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."***

Think on those words for a bit. God isn't talking to others here; he is talking to you. *You* have become new and clean. *You* have become, in the words of our text, ***"the righteousness of God"*** through faith in Jesus Christ. *You* – the righteousness of God! That's the miracle that

has been performed in you. That's how God has made you clean and pure and new in his sight – he put all that was evil and unclean in you on his Son.

So also you and I now have a new job description. We are now more than just new and clean in his sight; we are **"ambassadors for Christ."** Don't think of this as some new set of rules or laws that God has now placed on us. Think of it as it truly is – a priceless honor and privilege.

Unfortunately Satan has enjoyed tremendous success in turning this new and good thing old and dirty and ugly again. He has convinced a staggering number of Christians to make the circle from law to gospel and then right back to law again. He does so with seductive reasoning. You've heard it before: *"Jesus did this for you, so what are you now going to do for him? How are you going to prove that you really love and deserve him? How are you now going to do your part to complete the circle of your salvation? Jesus did his part, will you now do yours?"*

See the problem? That's not gospel, its law – which is the old, failed way. The **"ministry of reconciliation"** that our text talks about is not a new tyrant that has to be obeyed; it is who and what we are. It is our great and high calling. Our new job description is no more oppressive than if we were called to inform folks that a long-lost relative has left them a fortune in his will, or deliver to cancer patients a full and immediate cure for their disease. New and clean ambassadors for Christ just means that we get to tell others how they can have exactly what we've been given, how they too can avoid eternal torment and instead inherit heaven.

What a great job.

God's cleansing power – not so insignificant as it first appears, is it? It is, in fact, arguably the greatest and most intimate connection we will have with our God this side of eternity. God help each of us to fully grasp the facts of exactly what has been done for and in us by our Triune God – the incredible miracle of our cleansing - and fill us with joy at the positions of honor and importance that are now ours. You are God's child and an ambassador for Christ himself. Remind yourself daily of one more thing: because you are now God's holy representative and beloved child, he has placed his own divine power at your disposal and has invited you to use it. So use it. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 12:1-6** You will say in that day: "I will give thanks to you, O LORD, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me. ² "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid; for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation." ³ ¶ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And you will say in that day: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. ⁵ "Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth. ⁶ Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel."

^{ESV} **Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ ¶ So he told them this parable: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 6, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 421 (Red Hymnal)

"Come Follow Me, the Savior Spake"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 12:1-6) Lent is that season of the church year where we focus in particular on our sinfulness and marvel at the fact that God punished his own Son in our place. God visited upon his Son the penalty for what you and I had done wrong. May God the Holy Spirit give each of us the kind of heart that appreciates and thrills to such news. Our Old Testament lesson pointed God's people forward to the events we now celebrate as complete and certain.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24) Our Gospel reading is the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. Though it is certainly comforting to know that we have a God who considers our sin-debt to have been paid in full by His Son, and who is always ready and willing to call back to his side those who have wandered, we pray this morning that he would prevent us from ever leaving his side in the first place.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 250 (Red Hymnal)

"Holy God, We Praise Thy Name"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"New and Clean"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Baptism Hymn -300 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Dearest Jesus We Are Here"

The Baptism of Sloane Cadence Hoffert

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -47 (Red Hymnal)

"Savior Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Sun (38) Ave (46) Wed (28) Organ Fund (\$19,935) Goal (\$22,000)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
Wednesday	-4:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Saturday	-2:00 p.m.	– Schiermeister Renewal of Vows
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Paul Naumann has accepted the call to serve on the faculty of ILC. Holy Trinity of West Columbia has called Pastor Matt Hanel. Gethsemane Lutheran School of Spokane has called Teacher Sara Pfeiffer.

CLC Summer Camp – Information on how to sign up for this summer's CLC Youth Camp in Pillager, MN is available at koyquin.clclutheran.net.

Lenten Services – A reminder that our midweek Lenten service series continues this Wednesday at 7:00 pm.

Confirmation Schedule – Parents of Confirmation Class students please note that Confirmation Class is scheduled for 4:00pm on Wednesday.

Church Council Meeting – Council members please note the meeting scheduled for next Sunday following the fellowship time.

Tables – One final reminder that since our storage space is limited we are offering the older brown wooden tables to any members who want them. Please speak to President McEnroe if you are interested.