

"God's Amazing Power to Cleanse and Transform"

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 those sins have there found full and complete forgiveness. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Many of you have long ago discovered the simple pleasure of "escaping" the North Dakota winter in the pages of a good novel. A good book can take you on a fantastic journey without ever leaving the comfort of your den or living room. I'm reading one right now about a man who happened upon an incredibly rich gold deposit in a remote, hidden valley in the mountains of northern New Mexico. Finding and extracting the gold turns out to be the easy part. The hard part is actually protecting his claim and getting all those millions into the safety of a bank.

Stop here for just a moment and consider such a scenario. Allow yourself a few minutes to let your mind wander into the fantasy, but then examine your own thoughts and desires once you have considered such a scenario. What is the general nature of the desires that pop into your head when you think on such things? Put yourself in the man's shoes and try to imagine what you would do. Who here, for example, wouldn't thrill to the virtually unlimited wealth that could be yours? If you really spent some time working through the various challenges and obstacles in your mind, you would without question run head first into sin obstacles at every turn. If you didn't own the land, for example, you would try your best to obtain claim to it, most likely under false pretenses. There's a problem already there with the Seventh Commandment, isn't there? How would that work with the Commandment's exhortation to "help our neighbor improve and protect his property"? The prospect of unlimited wealth is almost universally thrilling, but is it thrilling to the new man in us or to the old Adam?

Interesting little window into our souls, isn't it? Even while hearing or reading a sermon we can almost immediately become preoccupied with materialism, so powerful is its lure, so powerful is the greed and lust within us. We are so quick to want to take upon ourselves the providence that belongs to God. Isn't that really what we're talking about here? An honest evaluation would tell us that we are not all that comfortable with letting God supply us with what is best for us, despite his promise that he would. Shouldn't that tell me that something is fundamentally wrong with my attitude?

We need help, but how do we go about adjusting our attitudes towards what should and should not be the object of our desires? How can we possibly hope to reorganize, reprioritize, and realign our perverted appreciation for what is truly good for our eternal souls? How can we learn to even desire what we ought to desire? No project - and especially not one this important - can ever be accomplished without the power of our God working in our hearts through his Holy Word. The good news is that that power is there, and for such help we turn to his Word, found this morning in the Book of Second Corinthians, the 5th Chapter:

2 Corinthians 5:16-21 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. ¹⁸ Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. ²⁰ Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

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. Desiring to be filled and preserved in the faith, and to learn to be fully satisfied with our God's will for our lives, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

The fantasy of sudden, unearned wealth offers us a glimpse of our twisted sense of worth and value. There are other indicators that could and should clue us in. We live as part of a society that values entertainers above farmers, artists above artisans, tax spenders above tax payers, and the lottery above the paycheck. Above all, we value self. If this were not so, the Church would never lack for money and missions would never lack for either manpower or funding.

Yet it is one thing to fall short of the goals and the perfection that we desire, it is quite another to fail in even desiring the right goals. This is

the predicament in which Christians find themselves today. We are not just failing to achieve God's goals, we have changed the goals - lowered the bar - and now we are failing to achieve even those reduced standards. When we hear the Bible say that we all fall short and that we all sin, in our minds we seem to be assuming that the goals and standards we have set are all well and good; in our weakness we are just failing to measure up. Not so.

In fact our problem is much more complex than that. Our aspirations have plummeted. We no longer aspire to the levels God has set for us. We no longer even desire what we are supposed to desire, let alone set our hearts thereupon. Thanks be to God that we are saved by grace and not by works, because we are not even in the right league. Want evidence? Ask yourself if you really want to spend the rest of your life in humble service to your God, come what may? Would you like to be a man or woman single-mindedly devoted to God – an Anna or a Simeon focused daily on your Christian faith? Think of the things in life that give you the most pleasure. Would you gladly – or even *reluctantly* - give them up for the opportunity to better and more closely serve our Lord Jesus? Is that, in other words, what we really want out of life - to live as **"a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God"**? Do we even think of that as **"our reasonable service"** (which is what Romans 12:1 calls it)? Herein lies one of our greatest problems today. We are not even aiming at the right target. We aim low, and hit even lower.

These are the sorts of insights we need to acknowledge if we are to maintain a proper appreciation for the forgiveness Jesus won for us. These are the sorts of honest evaluations that will prevent Jesus from becoming tedious - something less than he should in our lives. In me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing – and yet Jesus Christ died to save even me.

Our text describes a whole different state of heart and mind, a whole different world, separate and distinct from that of the godless. A state 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.

The world naturally ridicules Christianity for at least five reasons. First, because it is based upon a crucified leader - a man who, in their eyes, was actually *defeated* by his enemies when he was put to death – a weak

leader and a failure. Second, to them Christianity is a movement that caters primarily to the "nobodies" of society, the down-and-outs who have little or no position, power, or wealth. To the world, the obvious question is "Why bother then?" and "Who cares?" Third, they dismiss our religion as silly because Christian teachings often defy human logic. Fourth, Christianity is foolishness to them because Christians rejoice in their own humility and weakness, and in their need to derive all of their power and ability from an outside, divine source, rather than from their own personal reserves of moral goodness. Finally, the world holds Christianity in contempt because it places no value on the very things that the world values the most.

Our text uses these words to teach us of God's transforming power: **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."** 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 incredible 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 causes you shame or guilt. You will have to find your own dumpster here; mine is more than filled by my own trash...

Yet 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 *into himself*! We need to recognize that God the Father didn't just write all this sin off as some sort of bad debt. 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 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."**

Think on those words for a bit. God isn't talking to others here; he is talking to you. You have become **"the righteousness of God"** through faith in Jesus Christ. You – the righteousness of God! Because God the Holy Spirit has so cleansed and transformed us, we

can not only appreciate the power and comfort of these words, we can desire what they offer.

But can we actually make changes? Can we actually learn to walk more nobly - as is fitting for what our text describes as **God's ambassadors**? The fact is the right decisions for the child of God are most often neither complicated nor obscure. Because of Reformed error, we in the conservative Lutheran Church tend to shy away from even using the word "decision." We seem to imagine that since we cannot "make our decision for Christ," that means that we can make no decisions at all. The fact is there *are* decisions to be made - important decisions - every day, every moment of our lives on earth. Not the decision of whether or not to come to faith, but decisions on how I will now live as a child of God. The decisions actually become very uncomplicated when, through the power of the Holy Spirit in you, you consider your actions here and now from the perspective of Judgment Day and eternity. That which will seem important then is that which ought to be important now. Hear the Lord Jesus pronounce you "not guilty" as you stand before his throne of grace. Now, from that perspective, and with the reality of that day vivid in your mind, choose in time the option you will wish you had chosen when time has ended.

Then most certainly you wouldn't be dreaming of gold mines and lottery tickets, you would be using the power of the gospel to bring souls from death to life. Then you wouldn't even consider the career move that would take you away from church and fellowship; never dream of spending a hundred hours with your eyes glued to television filth or nonsense for every five minutes glued to the Word of God. You and I would never then hesitate to speak that word of the gospel to that soul in need. That's the transformation and calling described in our text, isn't it – that our new job description is simply to share with others the power of that same Word of God that has cleansed us. That's that **"ministry of reconciliation"** that our text lists as our great and high calling. The simple message we are to carry was also laid out for us. As if God himself were speaking through us, we simply **"implore (others) on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."**

God grant then that each of us might be filled with such wisdom, with such vision, and with such dedication to our Lord Jesus Christ and to his will for our lives. We have been called to positions of honor and importance as God's holy representatives and he has placed his own divine power at our disposal. Grant us, Lord, the ability to appreciate both our cleansing and our calling. Make us holy instruments of your message of cleansing, renewal, and life eternal. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 12:1-6** And in that day you will say: "O LORD, I will praise You; though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. ² Behold, God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; 'For YAH, the LORD, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation.' " ³ Therefore with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ And in that day you will say: "Praise the LORD, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted. ⁵ Sing to the LORD, for He has done excellent things; this is known in all the earth. ⁶ Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

^{NKJ} **Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24** And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." ¹¹ Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. ¹² "And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. ¹³ "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine 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 bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸ 'I will arise and go to my father...' " ²⁰ "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. ²³ 'And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ 'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

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The Fourth Sunday in Lent – March 14, 2010

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn -#756- (Brown Hymnal)

"Jesus, Lover of My Soul"

The Order of Morning Service – Brown Hymnal page 12.

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

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 12:1-6) May the Holy Spirit give each of us the kind of heart that truly rejoices with the words of our Old Testament lesson; hearts that focus not on this life but on the Life that awaits us.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 2 (Page 30)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 15:2, 11-17, 20-24) Our Gospel reading is the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son. God grant that we ever remain faithful to our Lord – which is certainly the desire of the new man within us. Yet what a comfort 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 extend His mercy to penitent sinners.

The Confession of Faith – Nicene Creed (Brown Hymnal page 5)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn -#725- (Brown Hymnal)

"No Tramp of Soldiers' Marching Feet"

The Sermon – Text: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"God's Amazing Power to Cleanse and Transform"

"Create In Me" (The Offertory) – Brown Hymnal page 16 insert

The Pre-Baptism Hymn -#300- (Verses 1-3)

The Baptism of Madeleine Glora Handyside (Hymn 300 verses 4-5)

The Offering, followed by the Prayers

Pre-Communion Hymn -#755- (Verses 1-2 & 5) (Brown Hymnal)

"What Is This Bread"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn #305- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -#49- (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty God Thy Word Is Cast"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Last Sunday (54) 2010 Average (52) Wednesday (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
Tuesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Wednesday	-7:00 p.m.	– Mid Week Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-8:45 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship hour

CLC News – Pastor James Naumann is considering the call to Jamestown.

Pastor Joel Fleischer is considering the calls to Clarkston and Orofino.

Teacher Ryan Libby has resigned his call as teacher and principal at Grace Lutheran of Fridley, MN.

Church Council Meeting – Council members please note the meeting scheduled for this Tuesday at 6:00 p.m.

Baptism – is much more than just a ceremony. It is a means whereby God the Holy Spirit works saving faith in the heart of His little ones. We rejoice in that miracle again this morning.

Pastor Karp Update - Pastor Steven Karp is recovering at home from successful cancer surgery. Due to the radical nature of the surgery, ongoing therapy and adjustments will be necessary. Prayers are greatly appreciated. Please also remember Pastor Kevin McKinney and his health-related struggles. No recent updates have been made available.