

## I.N.I.

First Sunday in Lent: CLEANSING

Feb. 26, 2012

John 13:1-11; Ezekiel 36:25

In Christ Jesus, whose shed blood has washed us clean of all of our sins, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You see an American flag, you think of patriotism or maybe freedom. You see a Valentine heart, you think of love. You see a trophy you think of winning a contest. You see a dove, you think of peace. All of these objects teach us something. Sometimes objects teach us better than words, for objects catch the eye and the imagination.

In our Sunday morning Lenten services this year we are going to be looking at some objects, objects from the Passion History of our Savior that teach us certain lessons. Some of them you will recognize very quickly, others you may not. They are all listed in your bulletin this morning: the Water and the Towel; the Rooster and the Tears; the Thorns and the Whip; the Coins and the Dice; the Sponge and the Spear; the Pen and the Ink. During Holy Week we will focus on such objects as the Bread and the Wine; the Cross and the Nails; and the Rocks and the Empty Tomb. It is our prayer that when these objects are mentioned, not only will the events surrounding these objects come to mind, but that the lessons learned from them will also be in our hearts.

In an effort to help better cement these thoughts in our hearts and encourage us to remember them during the week, we will be placing replicas of these objects on our altar to remind us of what lesson we learned. When we are done we will have something similar to what we do for Christmas with a Crèche or Nativity Scene to remind us of Jesus' birth. These objects will remind us of Jesus' death and resurrection.

On our altar you see a cross. Every Sunday we will add objects to that cross. This morning we begin with the Towel and the Water---symbolized by a bowl. The Bible lesson is from John 13:1-11, Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Read the lesson...

There are many truths that we could meditate on this morning from that remarkable event on that Thursday night. Here is Jesus, burdened and weighed down with the thought of His impending suffering and death; knowing that soon He would be arrested, mistreated, tried, convicted, whipped, crucified and worst of all, forsaken by His Father as He endures the pangs of hell. Yet His thoughts are not on Himself. He has no self pity. He directs His actions toward His disciples. He shows them in a most humbling way what He will be doing in a few hours and hopes that they will remember that object lesson so that they too will do it for others.

We want to center our attention on the thought of **CLEANSING**.

### **1) The Need for CLEANSING**

### **2) The Way we are CLEANSED**

### **3) What is our Response to our CLEANSING**

You can't imagine a more shocking thing happening that evening, and yet there would be more. Jesus suddenly gets up from the table, takes off His outer garment, picks up a towel and ties it around His waist. He then fills a bowl with water and goes around the room washing the feet of His disciples and wiping their feet with the towel. What in the world is He doing?

We think of washing our feet only in the evening or in the morning when we take a shower. We usually don't wash our feet before we eat our meals. But remember in Jesus' day the people wore sandals and the roads were dirt. Therefore their feet would get a lot dirtier than ours. It was customary to have water basins in the entry-ways of homes where the people could wash their feet as they entered. In the homes of the more wealthy, servants would wash the people's feet as they came in. Well here is Jesus acting as a slave, a servant to His disciples. And that is what He is. Remember He said **THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS**

## **LIFE A RANSOM FOR MANY.**

This was God's Servant at work, His chosen one as we read in Isaiah 42, 52 and 53. This was the Son of God who took upon Himself the form of a servant and humbled Himself even to death as Paul tells us in Phil. 2:5-8 **HAVE THE SAME ATTITUDE THAT CHRIST JESUS HAD. ALTHOUGH HE WAS GOD, HE DID NOT CONSIDER HIS BEING EQUAL WITH GOD AS A PRIZE TO BE DISPLAYED, BUT HE EMPTIED HIMSELF, MADE HIMSELF A SLAVE, BECAME LIKE OTHER HUMAN BEINGS, AND WHEN HE APPEARED IN THE FORM OF A MAN, HE BECAME OBEDIENT AND HUMBLING HIMSELF EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH, YES, DEATH ON A CROSS.** (New Evangelical Translation) When God does the work of a slave for man, that's real love! But not everyone understood that. In fact, Jesus' own disciples didn't understand.

When Jesus approached Peter, he asked, **LORD, ARE YOU WASHING MY FEET?** Peter couldn't just sit still and let His Lord and Master abase Himself so. And Jesus understood Peter's misgivings. He knew that Peter and the others did not understand that this act of humility was preparatory for His ultimate act of humiliation upon the cross for all of mankind. So Jesus responds to Peter and says, **WHAT I AM DOING YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND NOW, BUT YOU WILL KNOW AFTER THIS.** In other words "trust Me Peter, soon you will understand why I am doing this."

But Peter was too upset to let it go at that. **YOU SHALL NEVER WASH MY FEET,** Peter exclaimed. Peter didn't realize what he was saying.

Jesus patiently responds, **IF I DO NOT WASH YOU, YOU HAVE NO PART WITH ME.** Jesus' answer had a spiritual meaning. Jesus was not talking about cleaning dirty feet, but cleaning sin-soiled hearts. It was not the feet that needed cleansing but the soul. We belong to Jesus only when He washes us clean from our sins through His shed blood. He must serve us in this way in order for us to have a loving, saving relationship with Him as our Lord and Savior.

Now Peter thinks he gets it and is really enthused, but he still misses the point. He says, **LORD, NOT MY FEET ONLY, BUT ALSO MY HANDS AND MY HEAD.** He was still not thinking of the spiritual washing.

Again Jesus points him to the spiritual with the words, **HE WHO IS BATHED NEEDS ONLY TO WASH HIS FEET, BUT IS COMPLETELY CLEAN; AND YOU ARE CLEAN, BUT NOT ALL OF YOU.** Because they wore sandals they couldn't help but get their feet dirty. A person who has bathed before leaving home, needed to have only his feet washed when he arrived at a person's home. With washed feet his whole body was clean. Peter didn't need his head and hands and body washed.

Then Jesus again speaks spiritually, **YOU ARE CLEAN.** Their sins were washed away by Jesus. This they believed, but not all of them. As we know Judas had refused Jesus' forgiveness and sought to betray Him into the hands of His enemies.

We all need to be cleansed, to be washed from our sins. That is the first truth we need to know. We cannot downplay our sins by saying, "I'm not as bad as so and so;" "I'm only human;" "No one is perfect," and all of the other many excuses our sinful flesh comes up with. We must be led by the Holy Spirit working through the Law to see not just a few spots and stains here and there, but complete and total filth all over us, covered with the muck and manure of sinful thoughts, words and deeds.

Then when we have acknowledged this we need to be led to realize that we cannot wash it off by ourselves. What did Pilate accomplish by washing his hands in front of all of the people. **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING!** His sin of condemning an innocent man was not washed away. It remained in him. Only the One standing before him, the One he was condemning could wash him clean of his sin.

That is why we confessed our sins by examining our everyday life in light of the 10 Commandments this past Wednesday and why we again confessed our sins this morning as we began

our service . Who of us can read God's commandments and their meanings, apply them to ourselves and then walk away saying, "I need no cleansing. I've kept them all." The Lord through John says, **IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NO SIN, WE DECEIVE OURSELVES, AND THE TRUTH IS NOT IN US...IF WE SAY THAT WE HAVE NOT SINNED, WE MAKE HIM A LIAR, AND HIS WORD IS NOT IN US.** But thankfully John also wrote, **IF WE CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US OUR SINS AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.** Again John writes, **BUT IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND THE BLOOD OF JESUS CHRIST HIS SON CLEANSSES US FROM ALL SIN.**

The LORD Jehovah speaks of this same cleansing in our second text from Ezekiel 36:25 where we read, **THEN I WILL SPRINKLE CLEAN WATER ON YOU, AND YOU SHALL BE CLEAN; I WILL CLEANSE YOU FROM ALL YOUR FILTHINESS AND FROM ALL YOUR IDOLS.** Notice it will not be the priests who will do this in a ceremonial way, but the LORD, JEHOVAH. **I WILL CLEANSE YOU,** the LORD says. These words were first spoken to the rebellious Israelites. In His unconditional love and mercy the LORD still reached out to His idolatrous people and cleansed them, washed them clean. When this is done what happens? We find out in the next verses: **I WILL GIVE YOU A NEW HEART AND PUT A NEW SPIRIT WITHIN YOU; I WILL TAKE THE HEART OF STONE OUT OF YOUR FLESH AND GIVE YOU A HEART OF FLESH. I WILL PUT MY SPIRIT WITHIN YOU AND CAUSE YOU TO WALK IN MY STATUTES, AND YOU WILL KEEP MY JUDGMENTS AND DO THEM.**

That is the response to Jesus' cleansing. We are so overwhelmed with His forgiving love, with His utterly selfless sacrifice that we are moved to live for Him. We will wonder, how in the world could we have acted so selfishly, so foolishly? How could I live in such an ungrateful way to my forgiving Savior? The message of His cleansing blood will so fill our hearts with love and compassion that we will selflessly go out and willingly, cheerfully serve others.

So what happened on that Maundy Thursday? After Jesus finished washing the disciples' feet, He applied the object lesson. He asked, **DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE TO YOU? YOU CALL ME TEACHER AND LORD, AND YOU SAY WELL, FOR SO I AM. IF I THEN, YOUR LORD AND TEACHER, HAVE WASHED YOUR FEET, YOU ALSO OUGHT TO WASH ONE ANOTHER'S FEET. FOR I HAVE GIVEN YOU AN EXAMPLE, THAT YOU SHOULD DO AS I HAVE DONE TO YOU.** Later that evening He also said, **AS THE FATHER LOVED ME, I ALSO HAVE LOVED YOU; ABIDE IN MY LOVE. IF YOU KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, YOU WILL ABIDE IN MY LOVE, JUST AS I HAVE KEPT MY FATHER'S COMMANDMENTS AND ABIDE IN HIS LOVE. THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU, THAT MY JOY MAY REMAIN IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL. THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU.**

That's the lesson from the Water and the Towel; **A lesson on CLEANSING.**

- 1) We needed cleansing because of our sins. We were completely filthy, covered with sins and therefore had no hope for everlasting life in heaven.
- 2) Christ provided that cleansing through His sacrifice of His shed blood on the cross, His suffering and death. We, in Christ, are now spotlessly clean in God's sight and heaven is ours.
- 3) Now that we have been cleansed by Christ, we will be moved to love and serve our Savior by going out and loving, serving and forgiving others and telling them how they too can be cleansed of all of their sins forever.

May that be the message we take home this morning and remember as we look at the Water and the Towel.

Amen.