

COVER UP OR COVERED WITH

We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:4)

²⁷For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ’s righteousness that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

What was hot news as I originally began writing this sermon a week ago is probably forgotten news as I deliver the sermon tonight. Names change but patterns will repeat themselves. So I’ll focus on the story rather than the names. Last week a publicist for a famous celebrity quit. He couldn’t do it anymore. His client was too much of a constant challenge. It’s hard to imagine having such a job. Even when your client’s actions are clearly harmful, it is the publicist’s job to justify his client’s behaviour, make excuses for it, hide it, dismiss its seriousness or cover it up. We who are without publicists try to do the job for ourselves. And it is an onerous demanding job. We show how it’s in our genes to do wrong. We point to others who can’t seem to do any better. We blame our actions on society or our wives or our parents or our poverty or our temptations in riches. That’s an exhausting job that never seems to end. Yet we willingly take it up, and if we have enough money we willingly hire somebody paying lots of money to take it up for us.

Jesus Christ offers us a different kind of life. You don’t hide behind excuses or cover up schemes. Neither do you run from God as Adam and Eve did or as Peter did or countless other sinners have done and still do. You don’t run and you don’t hide. Instead it’s a life of taking ownership over our actions, every single day, confessing our sin, receiving absolution and applying ourselves once again, forever often again “to live a new life”.

Ash Wednesday is all about standing fast and facing our sin. And it isn’t just facing it in some abstract philosophical way. It’s going through each of the Ten Commandments and seeing how we have sinned in thought word and deed. It’s also seeing how we have sinned in not just the “shall not’s” but also in the “should have’s”. For example, “You shall not murder” not just confessing anger against our brother as Jesus explains it, but also the “should have’s” of protecting life – the opposite of murder. Have I defended the poor, the powerless, the widow and the unborn? Yes, Ash Wednesday is all about standing fast and facing our sin in a most detailed, personal and uncomfortable way.

We go through a more elaborate and specific kind of confession. As a sign of our repentance we apply ashes as prophets of old. Those who grow more spiritually mature, take the further step of partaking of private or individual confession and absolution. You can’t hide behind anyone sitting in the pew in front. You stand facing your sin, as the pastor prepares to absolve you “speaking as God himself” speaks to you as the catechism promises.

Yes, it’s the most humbling experience, at least initially, to stand before God and really mean the words “my own fault, my most grievous fault”. But then it’s over. I can’t ever say “It’s all over”. I mean, if you murdered someone, you can’t bring them back from the dead. If you spoke harsh words, you can’t retrieve the damage done by those words. If you took drugs, you may have to struggle with addiction. But as for the eternal

consequences of your sin – it's over! And God promises to be with you, to guide you, and strength you as you face the consequences of your sin while you remain in the world. There is that spark of sorrow that remains but it's overshadowed by the eternal gifts that come with the blessings of your baptism, the forgiveness of sins, the rescue from death and the devil, and the bestowal of eternal life.

This absolution is what we emphasize today. You are buried with Christ. You are covered over so you don't need cover up. Instead of being covered with lies we are covered by Truth. It is the truth that Jesus has paid for our sins. It is the truth that he rights the wrongs.

In this Lenten Season we journey to the cross with Jesus to know the value of the sacrificial blood that covers us. It is the sacrificial blood which is applied to us through the waters of holy baptism.

What kind of blood is valuable as sacrificial blood? Many enjoy the study of genealogy. Maybe you've been intrigued by one of those web sites that helps you trace your ancestry like www.ancestry.com. We like to speak of noble blood and blood-lines. We still have the curious romantic notions that perhaps "I'm one of the blue bloods". But all mortal blood is of equal value and never enough to atone for sin. But in the Lenten Season we focus on the very "blood of God".

Our Toronto Circuit Pastors are given to study what seems and sounds at first to be a dry abstract subject called "Christology". Sounds like the end of a lot of other subjects we might study as students: biology, psychology, sociology, kinesiology but then theology, and now Christology. But every Christian studies it by virtue of being a student of God's Word. Who is Jesus? He is truly and fully God as well as fully man. He fully mortal man so that he can die for us. He is fully and truly God so that his shed blood has enough value to atone for our infinitely horrible sins.

The one who dies for us is God himself. He suffers for us in the person of Christ. Most of us grow up as little heretics and I'm no exception. We try to rationalize things so it conforms to our human reason and I suppose I was no different. I once thought of Christ as throwing a kind of internal switch. About to turn out a miracle, the switch is thrown to Deity. About to learn language as a 7 year old child, throw the switch to Humanity. But I've come to appreciate more and more the mystery of it all. He is truly God and Man, and in every step of his life, even pre-incarnate or post-resurrection life, he never ceased to be who he always was "The perfect Son of God" And in assuming human flesh he is as fully and truly 100% God and Human Being with both natures forever present at each step while not necessarily exercising the power of His deity or restricting himself to the weaknesses of his humanity. All his humanity and deity are held together in tension but a mysterious unity so every part of his person experiences everything.

When he was assumed human, flesh in the womb of the Virgin, he remained who he always was from all Eternity. So Lutherans do not hesitate to call the Virgin Mary, "The Mother of God, for that is who she is which speaks more to who Jesus is, "Truly God".

During the Lenten Season it changes everything. The Man Christ Jesus who suffers is also the God, Christ Jesus who suffers. There is new insight I believe as we begin singing that canticle: "Your heart is grieved". From the very grieving heart of God comes the blood which cleanses us of our sins. We think of blood as a stain that might only come out in a cold water wash. But the Biblical idea is that our baptismal robes which declare us holy before the Almighty were first washed in the blood of the Lamb who is Christ Jesus. And so we think of

the verse from the book of Revelation. “They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (Revelation 7:14). “

In Holy Baptism we are covered with the blood of the Lamb so we need not be consumed with cover up. So what does that mean?

- 1) We no longer live a life of the fugitive. We don't run. We don't hide.
- 2) We are covered over with the precious blood of Jesus. Our baptism is valuable. It's a richer covering than any weaver could possibly weave. It bestows an inheritance.
- 3) With such a valuable thing as baptism we know that we are loved.

Think of what the pastor says as he invites the congregation to consider the significance of your white robe:
Receive this white garment to show that you have been clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers all your sin. So shall you stand without fear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the inheritance prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

You start life with no need to fear. You have an inheritance. It is prepared for you from the foundation of the world. The grace, love and mercy of God – the One who brought all things into being – are your constant possession. And it changes you.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood,⁶ and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him *be* glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

So we ought to conclude this evening considering where we have come. The world is all about the cover up. The rich hire their publicists to do the job while most of us bumble along doing the job ourselves. We seek to run, hide, and deny. It's a terrible life. I recently watched the story of con man “Frank Abagnall in “Catch me if you can? Frank was cashing cheques for hundreds of dollars. He had the parties and he had the girls but he didn't have a home. He always was looking over his shoulder. In the most pitiful scene he calls his nemesis, FBI agent Caral, on Christmas Eve.

The conversation ends with the FBI agent saying, “Why are you calling me? It's Christmas Eve. It's because you have no one else to call isn't it?! A question as much as a statement. You have no one else to call! It's because you have no one else to call.

Sin makes us slaves and fugitives. We run and hide. We have no peace. We have no home. Jesus says “Come Home”. Be covered in baptism rather than cover up of the world.

Amen.