

WD June 24, 2024

“Cleaned Up In Christ”

Are you a mess? A while back while in Michigan I had the privilege of baptizing my nieces little ones and their dad. My niece and her family are always a joy to be around. The plan at the Baptism was to have family and friends over to their house to celebrate the baptisms. That meant that the house needed to be cleaned up. According to her mother, my sister, my niece is a stay-at-home mom who is wonderful with her kids, but she is not a housekeeper.

My niece admits that her house is often messy. We had dinner the night before the Baptism with her family. It was there that she told us that she had apparently been trying to clean up the house for two weeks. She and her husband looked around the room and just started laughing at themselves. We laughed with them because she also said, and it still looks like a tornado came rushing through the place. I didn't think it looked all that bad. Any house that has two busy little ones three years and 18 months is going to look like a huge toy box; furniture is going to be displaced, and the kitchen will have lots going that isn't about cooking food. Her devotion to her children is without question as good as it comes.

There is a truth in scripture. No matter how good we think we are we are still a mess because of our sin. Sin kills everything it touches from marriages, to friendships, between parents and their children, even to our bodies. Romans 5:12 tells us that we are all ruined by Adam's sin.

This week at VBS we are talking about what a mess humanity has become in sin. The first reality is that we are sinners. Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the world. The following chapters illustrated how quickly things got messy. In Genesis 3—There are curses--Pain in childbearing and thorns and weeds from the cursed ground. In Chapter 4 disfunction finds the first family as Cain kills Abel. In the end Adam and Eve lose both of their sons, Abel to murder and Cain to exile. And already by chapter 7 (just seven chapters) the whole world is so messy that the Lord floods the world while Noah is preserved in the ark. Family disfunction, drama at work, bullies at school, and an infinite number of things give us plenty of evidence that life in this world is exactly as Revelation 7:14 calls it, a “great tribulation.” The tribulation is as big a problem as it gets.

Tribulation is life in this world. However, we also learn quickly that Jesus is the way out. God's people are seen in Revelation 7:14 as those who have come out of the great tribulation because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. That brings me to our theme verse for this year's VBS, Romans 5:8. “God demonstrates His own love for us in this...While were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Our mess is literally cleaned up in Christ.

“While were yet sinners” communicates that Jesus brings salvation to us. We cannot rescue ourselves. We cannot outsmart tribulation. We cannot problem solve our way out. We cannot do enough good to earn our way out of tribulation. None of those things work because our sin continues to plague and skew our emotions, our thinking, and our behavior.

Two examples of people that we are looking at this year are Samson and the prodigal son. They are in essence very similar. Samson with given great strength as a Judge of Israel in Judges 16. God called him to lead Israel. But he was a poor example, disrespecting his calling, his parents, and his God given authority. He was a mess acting more like a spoiled brat rather than a godly leader. He was prone to sexual temptations, rash behavior, rudeness, violence, and down-right stupidity. I mean how thick does one have to be to not see how he was being deceived by a Philistine prostitute, named Delilah. He tells her and suddenly by some miracle of coincidence Philistine soldiers just show up. But she finally gets it out of him, she cuts his hair, and he is hauled off. Interesting Samson's one and only recorded prayer was after he had been blinded, imprisoned, and mocked. It was on this last day of his life when he asks the Lord to grant him strength to bring the Philistine Temple of Dagon down. The Lord grants it and in a single move Samson kills more Philistines in that one moment that during his who life.

The prodigal son is no different. We probably know this story by heart. He wants nothing of the farm nor of dad. Well, he gets what he wants, and it leads him right to the pig pen. Talk about a mess. Finally, in the mess he realizes how dumb he has been. He returns home and is welcomed with a homecoming celebration.

Both men were huge messes. Both took their parents for granted and their blessings for granted. Both were given great opportunities. Both had intrinsic authority that they misused or forsook because they were

selfish in their desires. Both heap all kinds of trouble upon themselves with bad decisions to the point that they lose everything. Eventually, they return to their senses. Samson prays to His Father in Heaven and is given the strength to destroy the enemies of God along with their temple—finally honoring God more than himself. The prodigal returns to a loving Father.

Likewise, we or someone we probably know have taken much for granted; smarts, opportunities, gifts, family, and have traded it for a selfish or misguided fulfillment. With it is drama and trouble that costs them much. By God's grace some prodigals return home. Some don't. But the Good News is while Samson and while the prodigal were still sinning God was always ready offering them grace to come out of their great tribulations. Jesus is more ready to forgive us than we are to ask, even on our worst day.

We are cleaned up in Christ. Ultimately, we are brought out of the great tribulation, life in this world, which Jesus says in John 16:33 is full of trouble. Of course, the other side of this verse is that Jesus has overcome the world and therefore, all the trouble that goes with it. No where is this truer than in our own resurrections. In Jesus resurrection we literally come out of the tomb and out of this world and into a new one that will not spoil, fade, or disappoint. In the resurrection we are totally cleaned up in Christ, washed in the blood of the lamb. And because of it we are part of the family photo in Revelation 7. Imagine a family without drama, living in the Father's House which is always clean, never having to worry about any tribulation. No more messes. That's the reality given in Jesus.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30