

Sermon for August 30, 2015

I was never quick enough to use this argument with my mom at dinner time. But I can imagine the conversation going something like this: “Kids, it’s time for dinner; come in and wash your hands before you eat.” “Sorry Mom, but we don’t have to do that any more; Jesus says that we don’t have to wash our hands before we eat.” “Oh, and if Jesus were telling everyone to jump off the bridge into the river would you do that too? Now get into the bathroom and wash your hands before your father gets home!” Sound familiar? Maybe that’s why I didn’t use it; I knew how it would turn out!

But as it sometimes is with Jesus, this is more than just an argument about washing one’s hands before eating. It goes much deeper than this. It’s about how we are made righteous before God. In these verses Jesus is telling us that there’s nothing we can do on our own to be right before God; there’s just too much sinfulness within us for us to wash it away on our own.

So does that mean that we don’t have to follow the commandments? No, the commandments were given as a gift from God for us to use to live in right relationship with God and with others. In fact Jesus says that the greatest commandments are to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and to love your neighbor as yourself. But as good as the law is as a way for us to live together with one another; it can’t save us. At the most all it can do is be a mirror showing us where we fall short; indicting us with our failings. Take the example that Jesus gives in today’s reading. Honor your father and your mother is a pretty straight forward command;

yet the Pharisees have come up with a way for people to get around caring for their elderly parents and gaining money for the Temple.

Because of the fall sin permeates all of creation—even and especially us. The law with all of its good intentions can't save us. All the law can do is show us how sinful we are and how far we fall short. No matter how hard we try; we are slaves to the sin that is within us. It's as Paul writes in Romans: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."

But Paul continues in Romans and begs to know who will rescue him from this body of death? His answer—Jesus Christ! God has done what the law could no longer do; by sending his own Son in the flesh to deal with sin. The One who was without sin took on our flesh and lived a sinless life; trusting in the Father and following God's will. With that Jesus conquered sin and its end result—death; bringing us a chance of everlasting life. All of this he did while we were still sinners separated from God.

In Jesus' life, death and resurrection he has taken on our sinfulness and has covered us in his righteousness. This is what Luther calls "The Happy Exchange." Or as my mom would tell me; when God looks at us God no longer sees our sins, but sees the goodness of Jesus.

Through the waters of Baptism we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. When we receive Holy Communion we partake of the body and blood of our Lord and Savior. Martin Luther also claims that we are simultaneously saint and sinner. Any good that we are able to do in this life time comes from our abiding in Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit

and the nourishment we receive from communion gives us the ability to do the good that we are able to do in the world today. When that happens we are given a foretaste of the kingdom to come where God's will be the norm and where we will be able to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul and all of our mind and we will be able to love our neighbors as ourselves.