

Fifth Sunday After the Epiphany  
February 5/6, 2022

Who among us could stand before the Lord and declare that we are pure? Who can say that they have never used what we call bad words, or in some way maligned what is true? This is not a time for personal confession, but a time to stand honestly before the Lord. Like the prophet Isaiah, each of us would be telling the truth if we said, "I have unclean lips."

If that makes you uncomfortable, good! This is the part we rattle off each week that sometimes our minds quickly forget about. "If we say we have no sin . . ." The Lord knows you and me. He knows our thoughts. He created us. He knows us. We may be able to fool the world, even ourselves, but never the Lord. You and I are only as good as our worst moments. One uncharitable thought is enough to put us in the position of Isaiah.

What then? Look at the Lord's reaction. He is not indignant, outraged, or even upset. He knows. When we begin to grasp the salvation which is ours through faith and by grace, we begin to see that the Lord is not going to hold our sin against us. He has come to save us. Mind you, He is not going to simply let these things slide, for He has come to conform us to the image of Christ. I think that we sometimes think along terms of being cleaned up and sent upon our way, as if salvation were simply a bath.

Think this through and you will see that if the Lord just went for the simple things, sin would creep back in another way. Scripture has made clear that we will be made holy even and the Lord is holy. We are on a journey of becoming righteous, even as the Lord is righteous. The world wants us to conform to the ideal – whatever that is on any given day – but the Lord will conform us to the perfect man, Jesus. Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Unlike the ever-shifting focus of the world, we have a clear identity to which every faithful person is being conformed.

As far as the east is from the west, into a sea of forgetfulness, the Lord will eradicate sin from us. A hot burning coal. Sometimes the removal of sin will burn. Some of us have scars from sins that have been removed. This is but the beginning of the journey. Isaiah was alone before the Lord – as we all truly are – and the Lord asked whom He would send. You and I have been called through the water of our baptism to join in the cause of Christ. The world out there is going to hell. Many are rejoicing in what they think is their freedom to do as they please. It is a sad state of affairs. It was that way in Isaiah and the Apostle's time as well as our own, so don't think that we are in unique times. The world seeks to pull us into momentary distractions – and they come at us at an increasingly furious rate. Covid, politics, entertainment, social media, the news, and myriad other things tug at us every day to pull us into the frenzy of fear, worry, and even panic. Mind you, these are serious issues and I do not mean to make light of them, but greater still is the One in whose presence you are now standing. He means to take you as you are, where you are, and make of you one who is like Christ, going into this crazy world and humbly and simply being His faithful follower.

Saul persecuted the church. He was wrapped up in the cause to save what he believed was the church of his day. These upstarts were destroying Judaism. He was in a position to do something about it. He used worldly means to seek to put down the church. He was one of many who have come over the ages, seeking to destroy. There are those who have come against the church, as well as those who have come from within the church and have sought to destroy what Christ has come to do. You know them by their fruits. But Saul was confronted by Jesus. "Why are you persecuting me?" He was blinded. Jesus took this as a personal offense. Our Lord has

made clear that this is personal. The Lord showed him that his eyes were covered so that He could send one who was faithful to give Him sight. Does this not fit with what Scripture says? “There was a man who came proclaiming the light. He was not the light, but came that all might believe through Him.” The light that illumine us all is standing in our presence. Saul repented and became Paul, whose works we read of in Scripture. He makes clear to us that our salvation is not a matter of privilege, for he said, “as to one untimely born, who is unfit to be called and Apostle.”

Jesus did the same thing for Simon whom we call Peter. An ordinary fisherman, hired to give Jesus the place from which to preach. I can imagine Peter, half listening to what Jesus was saying, but thinking to Himself that this was an easy day’s earning by providing a boat for Jesus to stand and preach. Then Jesus tells Peter to drop down the net. More than a day’s catch is captured in a few seconds. Imagine the thinking going on. He heard Jesus preach, the words he may have been half-heartedly listening to, sunk in. The power to cause his net to be full. The strings of a lifetime pulled together in an instant moment. “Lord, I am unworthy of Your presence.” In deed, we are unworthy.

The beginning of the journey of faith is repentance, humility, and honesty. If we cannot be honest with ourselves – and let’s face it, we all lie the most to ourselves – then how could we ever expect to stand before the One who is Truth Himself? The word to focus upon here is the word “expect.” We all are worthy of what sin brings, death. No amount of posturing on our part can undo this. I cannot overcome past sins by present good behavior. God does not expect this. He knows our plight. Jesus knew that with Peter. He told him, “I will make of you something else, let us leave behind the old sinner.” We know that this did not happen in a moment, for Simon would rebuke the Lord and even deny Him three times before the cock crowed. It is what Jesus is doing and will do that counts, not where we have been or what we have done.

Faith is reckoned unto us as righteousness. We all are on the journey of becoming righteous. Day by day, the old Adam, the sinner, battles against the redeemed who seek to become like Christ. That the struggle, but remember always that greater is He who is in us than the who world (which He created and now gone wrong) put together. Our Lord is mighty to save!

The simple fact of the matter is that our Lord is calling us to follow Him. This does not just mean unclean lip service, but actually following Him, seeing that He will make of each of us what He will. Too often, we are lulled to a place of satisfaction, but the only true satisfaction is resting in the hands of the Lord. He will lead us all the days of our lives. As we get older, some will wonder, “Why am I still here?” Each day grants us the opportunity to progress in faith, anticipating what the Lord will do next in us and through us. You have been invited to a grand adventure that has no end. In this age, there are steps to take, challenges to meet, and temptations that will need to be overcome, but never forget the One who has called you is leading the way. He who has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion.

Do not set your sins aside, but confess them, take the burning coal and do not look to your right or left when the Lord calls. Like Isaiah, we all have, each day, the opportunity to say, “Here I am, Lord, send me.” Through the water of your baptism, our Savior has called you. In your life of faith, our Lord has equipped you. In the promise of the resurrection, you know that nothing in this world will ever be able to separate you from God’s love. Go into all the world and let the light of Christ shine through all you think, say, and do. Know that the Lord who has called you is with you always! Amen.

