

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 13  
Saturday, August 21, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, August 22, 2021 at 9:00 a.m.

# “Without a Spot or Wrinkle”

Ephesians 5:22-33

I have been thinking a lot this week about being a Christian in Afghanistan. It is a small community. No one knows how many because even the previous government did not recognize them. It horrifies me to think about what the Taliban will be doing to anyone found to be a Christian or be found to be educating girls for that matter. Please keep them in your prayers.

We take for granted the freedom to worship – to gather in our church, to confess our sins, hear the absolution, remember our Baptism, hear the words of the Gospel, take in Christ’s body and blood. As we heard Jesus say last week, “Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life.” And for those who don’t, there is no life in you. And yet, our society takes this gift for granted.

Paraphrasing C. S. Lewis, either what we do here is of no importance and we are all wasting our time, or it is infinitely important, because this is where God actually comes to us. The one thing God and life in the church cannot be is marginally important. It is everything or it is nothing.

However, there is no pristine, pure church on this side of eternity. We sin; we fail; we spend our days figuring out how much we can get away with and

imagine in our minds that God is still pleased with us, because, in our minds, we are still better than those other people.

St. Paul says that the church is without “spot or wrinkle.” This is how Christ presents His church to His Father – how He presents you. We look at ourselves and recognize that we are like those in our Old Testament reading who are told to “Read this” but we cannot. We see our spots and wrinkles. Then we read Revelation chapter 5. Christ, the Lamb who was slain but has risen, takes the scroll from He who sits upon the throne, and the Lamb is the only One who has the authority to break the seven seals and reveal God’s plan of salvation.

He has the authority to save you. He has the authority to stand in your place, take your punishment, cover your sin, and present you to God our Father as righteous, pure, and complete – without spot or wrinkle . . . holy and without blemish.

But, living on this side of eternity, that is rarely how we feel. I would venture a guess that we never feel complete and pure and righteous. It is a good thing that our salvation does not depend on how we feel. We remember too much. We have too many commandments of both God and man circling around in our heads. God’s commandments aren’t the problem. Us breaking them is the problem. We have red in our ledger. We have blood on our hands.

It is like the scene from Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Lady Macbeth (Act 5 Scene 1) is scrubbing her hands again and again. She will do it for 15 minutes at a time, we are told – or, as Shakespeare put it, a quarter hour. And she cries out, “Out damned spot. Out, I say!” She sees a spot of blood on her hands and it

won't wash away. She goes on to say that she can smell it and "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

In reality, there was no physical blood. But there was nothing she could do to take the guilt away. It is like Edgar Allan Poe's Tell-Tale Heart. It keeps pounding in your head. That is how sin feels sometimes. It just won't go away. This is how sin always feels without Christ.

Our world attempts to mask this through self-medication, or focusing on or distracting us with unimportant things, or comforting us with half-truths. The notion that you can cover up or mask your sin and it will simply go away in time is a myth. It is lie. The devil offers you the world, but leaves you hanging on a cross all by yourself, fed up and blaming Jesus.

Satan offers you the treasures or pleasures of the world and then wants you to take your sin and hide it, bury it deep inside your heart, hoping that no one finds out – living in the vain hope that maybe God will just cover up His eyes. Satan wants you to run away and hide – to live in fear. Satan wants you to be alone, and then be angry at God because you feel alone.

God has provided a much better solution to the problem of sin and evil. There is only One who has the authority to break the seals on the scroll. There is only One who could be a Husband to the Church, and give Himself up for her. There is only One who can take His bride, the Church, make her clean "by the washing of water with the Word" and present her, in splendor, without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing," as St. Paul says.

Lady Macbeth said, “Out damned spot!” Christ chose to be damned for you. He suffered the punishment for the guilt of your sin. He endured separation from His Heavenly Father (which is the worst part of hell). Judgment with no hope of grace. This is what Jesus chose. Only He has the authority to lay down His life for His bride. Only He has the authority to take it up again.

The spot and wrinkle and blemish of your sin; the red in your leger; the blood on your hands has been washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. And you have come out on the other side with robes that are white. Like a bride adorned on her wedding day, you are beautiful in the eyes of the Groom.

Life in the church is not about making sure you keep all the “rules taught by men,” or honoring God with the “right kind of words.” As we heard Jesus say in our Gospel reading, “In vain do they worship me.” And He quotes Isaiah, “These people honor Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me.”

God does not need your eternal flattery. He has plenty of glory and honor without anything coming from us. As Scripture says, He desires “a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.” Confess your sin; repent of your sin; know that Christ has covered your sin. Lady Macbeth was broken and was trying to fix herself. There is only One who has the authority to fix your brokenness. And as He said on the cross, “It is finished.”

Christ, the Bridegroom of the church, has the authority to cover the all the sins of His bride, and present you before God without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish. Amen.