

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

December 16, 2020

INVOCATION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

People: But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Pastor: Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

All: Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for you and for his sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, giver and perfecter of our faith, we thank and praise You for continuing among us the preaching of Your Gospel for our instruction and edification. Send Your blessing upon the Word, which has been spoken to us, and by Your Holy Spirit increase our saving knowledge of You, that day by day we may be strengthened in the divine truth and remain steadfast in Your grace. Give us strength to fight the good fight and by faith to overcome all the temptations of Satan, the flesh, and the world so that we may finally receive the salvation of our souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON *2 Chronicles 34:1-8 and 14-21*

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. He also burned the bones of the priests on their altars and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem. And in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, and as far as Naphtali, in their ruins all around, he broke down the altars and beat the Asherim and the images into powder and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel. Then he returned to Jerusalem. Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had cleansed the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz, the recorder, to repair the house of the Lord his God. While they were bringing out the money that had been brought into the house of the Lord, Hilkiah the priest found the Book of the Law of the Lord given through

Moses. Then Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan. Shaphan brought the book to the king, and further reported to the king, "All that was committed to your servants they are doing. They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of the Lord and have given it into the hand of the overseers and the workmen." Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it before the king. And when the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. And the king commanded Hilkiah, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Abdon the son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, "Go, inquire of the Lord for me and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that has been found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the Lord, to do according to all that is written in this book."

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE LESSON *Colossians 3:12-17*

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL LESSON *Matthew 21:12-17*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twenty-first chapter.

People: Glory to You, O Lord.

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to You, O Christ.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

SERMON

In 2015, bed retailer, Time4Sleep, had a competition to find the messiest bedroom in Britain. The winner? Five-year-old Harry Bateman, who beat out 99 other applicants. The picture of the room is...interesting? I'm not sure of the word to describe it. The floor is covered and inches deep in LEGOs (have you ever stepped on one? They HURT!). On top of the LEGOs are stuffed animals, balls, and other toys; the carpet cannot be seen. His desk has children's books all over, and it looks like a tornado hit his bed, with the sheets, blankets, and pillows in a jumbled and twisted pile. What was the prize for this contest? A storage bed (remember, it was by a company called Time4Sleep). At the very least, the bed sounds like it will get some good use and go to a good home. Hopefully it helped little Harry to be more organized! Messes. If anyone knew anything about award winning messy rooms, it would have to be Josiah. The man spends his life cleaning messes. Simply put, Josiah inherits a mess.

King Josiah comes from some of the worst men in the entire Old Testament; at the very least, he comes from some of the worst kings. His Grandfather, Manasseh, ruled for 55 years and "did what was evil in the LORD's sight." He undid the religious reforms of his father, Hezekiah, and rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah tore down. Manasseh made altars to the Baals, Asherahs (which were wooden poles for the goddess of the same name), and all the hosts of heaven, and worshipped and served them. He even built them altars in the Jerusalem Temple! Only God's Name is to dwell there!

While Manasseh did public evil, he also committed personal evil, too. He burned his sons as an offering, used fortune-telling, omens, and sorcery. He dealt with mediums and necromancers. Is it a surprise that we read in 1 Kings 33:9: "**Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray, to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the people of Israel.**" Talk about a mess. Fortunately, Manasseh later repents and undoes these things, but the damage has been done to the faith life of Judah. His actions have no lasting impact.

His Son, Amon, succeeds him. He is Josiah's father. The old English idiom applies well to him: "Like father, like son." He, too, "did what was evil in God's sight." He sacrificed, served, and worshipped the gods that Manasseh did. However, unlike his father, he didn't humble himself, nor repent. The text says he "**incurred guilt more and more!**" In other words, he was worse! King Amon was later assassinated, and his reign only lasted two years.

Next up to the throne is Josiah. He becomes king at the young age of eight. Josiah is a special young man, and is Judah's last great king. Verse two describes Josiah in this way: "**And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.**" This is the Hebrew way of saying that Josiah was "straight laced," or "straight arrow." He is the only king described this way. At the age of 16, the text says, "**he began to seek the God of David his father.**" Four years later at the age of 20, he goes to war against the idols in his kingdom. Seeking the God of his father David entailed the destruction of all rivals, rival altars, and objects of worship. In the Hebrew mind, 20 was the age that the Hebrews considered a boy to be ready for a man's work. For Josiah, the time had come, and God had just the man for the task!

Josiah initiates an unprecedented reform effort; an unprecedented clean-up. It is systematic and thorough. He purges Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, Asherim, and all idols, by removing and chopping them down. And if smashing and pulverizing them wasn't enough, Josiah makes sure that no one would ever use them again by defiling them all with the pollution of the dead. He spread idols' ashes over the graves of those who worshipped them. He polluted the sacred places with the bones and remains of those who served them as priests. Josiah wasn't joking around; he was cleaning up.

At the age of 26, Josiah has another mess to clean up: the temple. Apparently, no repair had been made since the days of Joash, 200 years earlier. The temple was trashed during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. So, Josiah collected an offering to do the repair work for the temple. As they did the renovations, they found a startling discovery. Hilkiyah the priest finds the Book of the Law (first five books of the OT); it is probably the authentic copy by Moses himself! Hilkiyah gives the book to Shaphan, Josiah's secretary, who brings and reads it to him. It is in this reading, though, that Josiah finds out about another mess.

As Josiah hears this word of God, he responds by tearing his clothes. He apparently never heard this word before! It shows the great unfaithfulness of God's people during the reign of his father and grandfather. A great and important portion of God's Word had been entirely lost; Amos's prediction of a famine of God's

Word came true. As Josiah hears this Word read, he is repentant and overcome by grief. He applies the Word to himself, and sees his sin and failings, not just that of the people. He sees his internal mess, and repents at hearing how *he* has fallen short of what God demands.

Sadly, Josiah's clean-up efforts come up short. I remember tidying up my living room one day with my daughter. As I put her toys back into the bins, I noticed that she would immediately grab them, and begin pulling everything out. As I moved on to the next bin, she did it a second time. As I moved to the third bin, it happened a third time. Everything I cleaned up came back out. It was as if I had never cleaned at all! That happens to Josiah. His reforms aren't enough to spare Judah and Jerusalem from the wrath to come. However, he is spared from seeing it in his lifetime. Once he dies, the bins get pulled back out. The altars and idols get brought out, and set back up. In his life, Josiah learned all about messes and cleaning up.

We know messes, too, don't we? Like King Josiah, we see the outer mess around us. The world isn't what it used to be- morals, values, and norms aren't what they once were, and they probably aren't coming back. They have changed, and are changing. Christian values and ideals aren't the norm anymore, and aren't common place.

But, like Josiah, we cannot miss the *inner mess* that he saw. In Genesis 6:5, we hear, **"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."** Jesus says, **"But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander."** Paul, in Romans 3, says, **"None is righteous, no, not one,"** and **"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** Sin. We cannot hide it. It is a terrible mess. We will be exposed. It is a mess that we cannot take care of. It is a mess that we cannot clean up. It is a mess I cannot get rid of. We need a guy like Josiah, one who knows how to clean up messes.

Fortunately, we have a son of Josiah, Jesus. Jesus knows all about messes. Messes don't scare Him away. The smell won't stop Him. The foulness won't push Him away. The size won't intimidate Him. There is no mess that He won't tackle, no mess He won't clean. For Jesus was sent into the world to save it, not condemn it. At the cross, He bears the ugliness and mess of sin. Isaiah described Him as "marred, beyond human semblance." He was crucified for us. Jesus knows all about messes.

However, Jesus also knows about clean-ups, too, and how to clean. He was raised three days later in a clean, orderly tomb, announcing our salvation and the victory He won. Our Lord works repentance in us, like He did Josiah. Repentance is His gift that He works in us through the Word (read, spoken, or preached), and by the Holy Spirit. He leads us away from that sin that traps, defiles, dirties, and pollutes. He works in us daily through baptism, where the old Adam, the old sinful nature is put to death, and the new man, the new nature, arises. It is in baptism that we are clothed in Christ and His righteousness, and united Him in His death and resurrection. We are being made new! We can stand without fear before the Father!

Our Lord works through us in His Word, a Word that kills and makes alive, that restores, strengthens, and comforts. Jesus works in His Supper, where He strengthens us with His body and blood, and restores us. It is one of the ways that He gives us that precious gift of forgiveness.

King Josiah knew all about messes and clean-ups in his life. Fortunately, for us, Jesus does, too.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICAMUS AND BENEDICTION

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. *Numbers 6:24–26*

People: Amen.

CLOSING HYMN “On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry” *LSB* 344

1 On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry
Announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and hearken, for he brings
Glad tidings of the King of kings!

2 Then cleansed be ev’ry life from sin;
Make straight the way for God within,
And let us all our hearts prepare
For Christ to come and enter there.

3 We hail Thee as our Savior, Lord,
Our refuge and our great reward;
Without Thy grace we waste away
Like flow’rs that wither and decay.

4 Lay on the sick Thy healing hand
And make the fallen strong to stand;
Show us the glory of Thy face
Till beauty springs in ev’ry place.

5 All praise, eternal Son, to Thee
Whose advent sets Thy people free,
Whom with the Father we adore
And Holy Spirit evermore.
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHRISTMAS DECORATION DONATIONS: Sanctuary Christmas decoration donation slips are available in the narthex. Please indicate your willingness to help defray decoration costs by using the donation slip. Place in the offering plate or hand to an usher. Donation slips will be available through December 25.

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