

PSALM 51:1-12

THE FIRST VERSE OF AN OLD HYMN BEAUTIFULLY DESCRIBES ONE OF THE REASONS LENT IS A SIGNIFICANT PHASE OF THE CHURCH YEAR.

THE LYRICS PROCLAIM: "SOFTLY AND TENDERLY JESUS IS CALLING, CALLING FOR YOU AND FOR ME. SEE IN THE PORTALS HE'S WAITING AND WATCHING, WATCHING FOR YOU AND FOR ME.

COME HOME, COME HOME, EARNESTLY, TENDERLY JESUS IS CALLING, CALLING, O SINNER COME HOME."

BUT SOMETIMES, AS MUCH AS WE MAY WANT TO GO HOME, A FEAR ARISES WITHIN SOME PEOPLE OVER THE KIND OF WELCOME THEY MIGHT RECEIVE.

EVEN CHRISTIANS AT TIMES, HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO DOUBT WHETHER OR NOT GOD WILL REALLY FORGIVE CERTAIN SINS.

AFTER ALL SIN INCURS A DEBT WE OWE TO GOD, A DEBT THAT WE CAN NEVER REPAY BECAUSE WE LACK THE ABILITY, AND OFTEN THE WILLINGNESS, TO REMAIN SINLESS.

BUT THERE IS AN OLD STORY ABOUT DEBTS THAT MAY HELP ENCOURAGE US, OR HELP US ENCOURAGE OTHERS, CONCERNING THIS PROBLEM AND THE FEAR IT MAY INVOKE.

LONG AGO, THERE WAS A PHYSICIAN WHO SERVED BOTH THE OWNERS AND WORKERS IN A MINING COMMUNITY. THE DOCTOR CARED FOR ALL THOSE WHO CAME TO HIM WITH PROFESSIONAL SKILLS AND PERSONAL DEVOTION.

HE NEVER RETIRED, BUT INSTEAD CONTINUED SERVING THE COMMUNITY UNTIL JUST BEFORE HE WAS HOSPITALIZED IN THE LAST DAYS OF HIS LIFE.

DURING THAT TIME, THE DOCTOR CALLED HIS SON TO HIS BEDSIDE TO MAKE HIS LAST WISHES KNOWN TO HIM.

HE SAID- "THE FIRST THING YOU MUST DO AFTER I DIE IS TO GO TO MY OFFICE.

LOOK IN THE BOTTOM DRAWER OF MY DESK AND TAKE OUT ALL OF THE PAPERS YOU FIND THERE AND BURN THEM."

HE FOLLOWED HIS FATHER'S WISHES THE SAME DAY HIS FATHER DIED.

BUT BEFORE BURNING THE PAPERS HIS CURIOSITY COMPELLED HIM TO LOOK AT THEM.

A BRIEF GLANCE REVEALED THAT THEY WERE A RECORD OF ALL THOSE WHO OWED THE DOCTOR FOR HIS SERVICES.

AFTER REALIZING WHAT THEY WERE THE SON READ NO FURTHER AND DUTIFULLY BURNED EVERYONE.

WHEN THE SON MET WITH HIS FATHER'S LAWYER TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF SETTLING THE ESTATE, THE ATTORNEY ASKED FOR THE RECORDS OF MONEY OWED TO THE ESTATE. HE REPLIED THAT NONE EXISTED.

ASHES- WAS ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THE RECORD OF WHAT WAS OWED TO THE DOCTOR. ASHES MEAN ALL DEBTS ARE CANCELLED.

AND THIS IS LIKE WHAT JESUS HAS DONE WITH OUR SINS. HE HAS CANCELLED THESE DEBTS THROUGH HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

JESUS HAS MADE OUR SIN, OUR DEBT TO GOD ASHES THAT ARE BLOWN AWAY BY THE WIND, NEVER TO BE SEEN AGAIN.

THE APOSTLE PAUL WROTE TO THE CORINTHIANS ABOUT CHRIST MAKING US RIGHTEOUS.

SPEAKING AS AN AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST, PAUL ALSO SAID "WE ENTREAT YOU ON BEHALF OF CHRIST TO BE RECONCILED TO GOD."

AND THE ACT THAT ENABLES US TO BE RECONCILED IS CHRIST'S WORK AND NOT OUR OWN.

HE IS THE ONLY ONE ABLE TO TURN OUR SINS INTO ASHES SO WE MAY BE FORGIVEN.

OUR PART IS MERELY A WILLINGNESS TO FIRST- ADMIT OUR SINFULNESS, AND SECONDLY TO ALLOW OUR DEBT TO BE PAID BY JESUS.

PSALM 51, THEREFORE, IS A GOOD PASSAGE TO CONTEMPLATE THIS EVENING BECAUSE IT OFFERS US A MODEL OF TRUE CONFESSION.

IT GOES BEYOND A SIMPLE STATEMENT OF REMORSE AND EXPRESSES A SINCERE DESIRE TO CHANGE.

KING DAVID, THE PSALMIST, BEGINS BY CONFESSING HIS SIN WITHOUT OFFERING ANY EXCUSES, OR PLACING BLAME OUTSIDE HIMSELF.

FURTHERMORE, HIS CONFESSION ALSO RECOGNIZES HIS OWN SINFULNESS IS A PART OF HIS HUMAN NATURE.

AND DAVID ALSO EXPRESSES HIS UNDERSTANDING OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF HIS SIN WITH A THREE-FOLD MENTION OF HIS FALLEN CONDITION.

HE SPEAKS FIRST ABOUT ‘TRANSGRESSIONS’- A WORD THAT IMPLIES OPEN REBELLION AGAINST GOD. HE MENTIONS “SIN”, WHICH DESCRIBES HIS FAILURE TO KEEP GOD’S LAW.

FINALLY, “INIQUITY” REFERS TO WICKED AND UNJUST ACTS HE HAS COMMITTED. THE PLEA FOR GOD’S FORGIVENESS MATCHES EACH DESCRIPTION OF HIS TRESPASSES.

THE WORDS “BLOT OUT”, OFFER AN IMAGE OF ERASING TRANSGRESSIONS. BLOTTING THEM OUT – WAS WHAT WAS DONE WITH INK ON PAPER USED IN ANCIENT TIMES TO CORRECT AN ERROR

NEXT, WASHING SUGGESTS REMOVING DIRT AND STAINS, ESPECIALLY FROM ONE’S BODY OR CLOTHING. AND TO CLEANSE IMPLIES MORE THAN A SIMPLE CLEANING, IT SPECIFICALLY REFERS TO PURIFYING.

THIS COULD BE LIKE BLEACHING CLOTH, OR MELTING METALS DOWN, SO IMPURITIES CAN BE SKIMMED OFF, AND WHAT REMAINS MOLDED INTO ITS CHOSEN PURPOSE.

HERE, IN THIS PSALM, WE LEARN THAT DAVID DOES NOT ASK FOR JUSTICE FROM THE LORD, BECAUSE JUSTICE WOULD CONDEMN HIM.

INSTEAD, HE PLEADS FOR GOD’S MERCY-HE ASKS FOR GRACE THAT WOULD TURN HIS SINFUL WORDS AND DEEDS INTO ASHES.

THEN, HE ASKS FOR SOMETHING MORE FROM GOD. HE ASKS TO BECOME A NEW CREATION FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

DAVID PRAYS: “CREATE IN ME A CLEAN HEART, O GOD, AND RENEW A RIGHT SPIRIT WITHIN ME.”

THIS PLEA EXPRESSES THE DESIRE TO BE IN A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

THUS WE CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE HOPE AND TRUST DAVID PLACED IN THE LORD HIS GOD AND HIS WILLINGNESS TO FORGIVE.

THIS EXAMPLE OF PLACING OUR HOPE IN GOD’S MERCY, BY TRUSTING HIS LOVE AND DESIRE TO FORGIVE, IS A GOOD ONE FOR US TO FOLLOW.

THIS IS EVEN MORE TRUE SINCE CHRISTIANS HAVE A GREATER HOPE THAN DAVID. WE HAVE THE PROMISE OF GOD SEALED IN THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

LENT LEAD US NOT ONLY THROUGH THE VALLEY OF SHADOW OF DEATH, TO THE CROSS, BUT PAST IT TO THE EMPTY TOMB.

LENT- REMINDS US IN A POWERFUL WAY ABOUT GOD’S PROMISES, AND RENEWS JESUS’ CALL FOR SINNERS TO COME HOME TO HIM.

LENT IS A TIME TO TAKE CHRIST’S HAND AND TRUST THAT WITH JESUS BY OUR SIDE WE WILL HAVE A BLESSED WELCOME.

AND SO, STEP-BY-STEP, DAY-BY-DAY, LET US FOLLOW OUR SAVIOR WHO HAS TURNED OUR SIN INTO ASHES, AND CREATED CLEAN HEARTS WITHIN US. AMEN

Ash Wednesday Service

Call to Worship

L: Jesus came calling people to repent and believe the gospel.

P: The Savior came telling us he is the way, the truth, and the life.

L: Let us come humbly before God this Ash Wednesday evening.

P: May we begin our Lenten journey with repentance and a renewed openness to God's Word.

Invocation:

P: We come before you this night seeking your presence, Lord. May our prayers and hymns be set before you be as incense and the lifting up of our hearts like an evening sacrifice. In Christ name we pray. Amen

***Hymn #543 "Abide With Me"** (verses 1 & 3)

Old Testament Scripture: Psalm 51:1-12

New Testament Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2

Ash Wednesday Meditation

Invitation to the Observance of Lent

L: We begin this holy season acknowledging our need for repentance and for God's mercy in forgiving our sins.

P: We begin the journey to Easter with the sign of ashes.

L: This ancient sign speaks of the frailty and uncertainty of human life, and marks this time of penitence.

P: Let us therefore bow our hearts before God, our Creator and Redeemer, and confess our sin.

Prayer of Confession

L: Gracious God, we confess our lives have not been pleasing to you.

P: Lord, in your mercy hear our prayer and forgive us for all the times and ways we have failed to live like Jesus taught. (Silent Prayer)

L: Send your Spirit to lead us back to you, and renew us.

P: For it is in the name of Jesus, your Son, our Savior we pray.

Amen

Assurance of Pardon: Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. God in Christ is merciful, all who truly repent and turn to the Lord are forgiven. Amen

Imposition of Ashes

L: Almighty God, you have created us out of the dust of the earth. May these ashes be for us a sign of our mortality and penitence, and a reminder that only by your gracious gift are we given everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

Please come forward to receive the ashes if you so desire

Turn from sin and be cleansed by the blood of Christ

Prayer: Heavenly Father, bless our Lenten journey with the guiding presence of your Spirit so our lives may glorify you. And by the passion and cross of Jesus, our Savior, bring us with all the saints to the joy of Christ's resurrection. All glory and honor be to you O God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

*Hymn 92 "Beneath the Cross of Jesus"

Benediction