

"Putting On A New Self"

Ephesians 4:17 – 5:2

August 9, 2015

11th Sunday After Pentecost

I want you to imagine a hot summer day (like today). You are foolish enough to have decided to work outdoors. You are mowing the lawn, digging in the garden, and so on. You are getting extremely hot, sweaty, and dirty. It becomes very uncomfortable and your spouse won't let you back into the house for dinner in that condition. So, you have a couple of choices. One, you can wipe the sweat off your brow with a handkerchief and try to brush the dirt off your clothes. But that doesn't make you feel any better, nor does it make you any more presentable for going into the house for dinner.

Or, you can head to the bathroom, take off all those filthy sweaty clothes, and hope into a cool shower which is both refreshing and cleansing. You feel better because you are clean. And, because you are clean, you are acceptable for entrance into the rest of the house.

What do you do now? You could pick up the old, sweaty, filthy clothes, put them back on, and head back outside. Or, you could get dressed in fresh clean clothes, sit down with a cool beverage and relax. I don't think it's a tough choice. If you chose the first option, people would wonder if you were crazy. The second option would be chosen, not out of necessity or by force, but out of desire. Our Christian life is much like this scenario and, surprisingly, many people are choosing the first option.

We labor hard under the hot sun of temptation every day. The clothes of our life quickly become soiled by sin. This is not just an occasional stain. Our lives are covered by the filth of our sin. It may be some horrible sin which you have done. It may be the high number of sins which you have done. Or, if you think you still are pretty good, think of the extensive nature of your sin. It's not just the bad that you have done but all of the good which you have failed to do. And it's not just your actions which are sinful, but, according to the Word of God, your words and even your thoughts, emotions, and attitudes which are sinful. Each of us has a life filthy with sin and sweaty with guilt.

This is not a very comfortable state to be in. Temptation continually beats down on us like a hot summer sun. Guilt makes us feel terribly uncomfortable like sweat on our bodies on a hot day. What are we to do? We can try to not give into temptation, but that's as effective as trying to stand in the sun and not get hot. We can try brush the filth of our sin off our lives or mop the sweat of guilt off our brows, but that doesn't work either.

There is only one answer and God is the one who has it. The filth of our old selves, which only leads to death and corruption, must be put off. Then we step into the cool and refreshing waters of Holy Baptism. In Baptism, like in a cool shower, God cleanses us of all our sins by applying the forgiveness won for us by Jesus' death on the cross.

That's not all. In the same way you put on fresh clean clothes after a shower, so, in Baptism, so God gives you a fresh clean self. That new self is the resurrected and living Lord Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27). In God's eyes, for the sake of Jesus Christ, you are holy and pure. As our text says, "[You are] created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." You have not been renovated and repaired. You are a completely new creature who is dead to sin and alive to Christ Jesus. The Word of God says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Cor. 5:17) We are acceptable to God and will be acceptable to enter into our eternal home someday.

But we are still faced with the question of how to live now. It's much like the question of what to do when getting out of shower on a hot summer day. Do we revert back to the sinful old self now that we have become clean? Or, do we, as new creatures, live pure lives in our new baptismal garb? Amazingly, many Christians today are going for the first option.

Somehow, we've gotten the notion that free and complete forgiveness from God for Christ's sake is a license which allows us to sin. Besides being unbiblical, it doesn't make sense. It's like saying a shower on a hot summer day allows us to go back to our filthy sweaty clothes. Why would you want to?

Yet many Christians today want to. They (We) see nothing wrong with engaging in and imitating the behavior of unbelievers. In our sexual behavior, use of money and possessions, our words and actions toward our neighbor, the value we place on the Word of God and many other things, we act just like unbelievers. We want to do what we want to do and deny that it's a sin or we do what we want to do, knowing full well it is a sin and not caring.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this should not be. That is what St. Paul is telling us today: "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!" (Ephesians 4:17-20)

As baptized and redeemed children of God, you have "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires." This means we don't accommodate sin or justify sin or willingly engage in sin. We despise sin and do not want it clinging to us after baptism any more than we want filthy sweaty clothes clinging to us after a cool shower.

Rather, we have put on a new self in Holy Baptism – a self created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. As new people, we live new lives in the power of the Holy Spirit "by whom [we] were sealed for the day of redemption." This is more than simply a theological proposition or some vague future event.

Baptism and the new self created by the Holy Spirit in us through baptism affect our every day life. The Holy Spirit covered us with Christ in our baptism and it is to our baptism we return to live in Christ. We don't get re-baptized every time sin threatens us, but we keep baptism and what happened there in mind when we make choices in life. We make the sign of the cross to remind us. We hear the words of baptism in the invocation when we gather for Divine Service to remind us. We see the baptismal font set up here to remind us. All of these things remind us of who we are because of baptism.

Who we are, as baptized children of God, leads us to how we then live. Paul gives us several practical examples. We no longer deal in falsehood, but we speak the truth to our neighbor. We should not allow anger to cause us to sin. Thieves should no longer steal, but engage in honest work. No corrupting talk should come out of our mouths, but only language that builds up those who hear. There should be no bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and malice among us as the body of Christ. Rather we should be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God, in Christ Jesus forgave us.

The list could go on and on. The basic premise remains the same: God's people are to live God pleasing lives which are different than the lives of those who are not God's people in the world today. We are new and different people because of our baptisms. That newness is reflected, not only in our status before God as pure and holy in His sight, but also in our conduct as we lead pure and holy lives. Anyone who is recreated to *be* like God will necessarily *act* like Him.

Will we ever fail at pure and holy lives? Of course we will fail countless times as long as we live on this earth. But do not allow failure become an excuse for not trying or not caring. We always have the power to live pure and holy lives by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments. We always have the forgiveness of all sins and restoration to God also by the working of the Holy Spirit through the Word and Sacraments.

Since you are new people because of your baptism, then live like the new people you are. Baptism both makes you new and empowers you to live new lives. And no matter how badly you failed or how often you failed yesterday, you always begin new today. Martin Luther summed it up this way in the Small Catechism: “[Baptism] indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” God has given you new life in your baptism. Live that new life to the full every day. Amen.