

"CLOTH"
Matthew 27:27-31

February 27,2013

Lent Service 3

Tonight, we have a picture of CLOTH before us. I want you to think about cloth for a minute. Cloth often keeps us warm. Think of a cold snowy evening when you jumped into bed and pulled a cloth blanket up to your chin. That's a nice feeling, isn't it? Cloth also can protect us. Remember a cold, rainy afternoon. Having a nice coat to protect you from the weather is a good thing, isn't it?

In our lesson for tonight, Jesus also has a piece of cloth wrapped around Him, but it isn't a pleasant experience. The Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus and wanted to kill Him, but they couldn't. Only the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, had the authority to order an execution. So, the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate. Pilate ordered his soldiers to flog Jesus.

So, the soldiers took Jesus and began to mock Him. They took off His clothing and put a purple cloth ROBE on Him. They made a crown of thorns and forced it upon Jesus' head until it bled. They put a staff in his right hand. And then the soldiers knelt down in front of Jesus in a mockery. They knelt down and made fun of Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews! They spit on Him and struck Him on the head again and again. What a tragic scene: here was Jesus, the true King of the Universe and these soldiers are mocking Him and making fun of Him by calling Him "king". When Jesus could not take any more abuse, the soldiers took off the purple robe, put on His own clothes and led Him away to crucify Him.

Why did this happen? Why would the Son of God let these soldiers do this to Him? Why did Jesus accept the purple cloth robe, the mocking, and, finally, the crucifixion? This all happened because of another piece of cloth. The Bible says that our lives are like cloth. However, our lives are not like this beautiful fine robe. The Bible says, "All of our righteous acts are like filthy rags." Why? We all try to do our best, don't we? We try to do good things and avoid doing evil things, right? But do we do that?

Think of your own life and actions. I am sure you can think of many times when you have done wrong -- when you have become angry and bawled somebody out - a friend, wife/husband, mother/father. I am sure that you have not always been loving, but critical and nasty and hurt someone. Think of the times when you failed to do good - when you had the chance to help someone, but you were too tired; when you could have shown love and support, but you didn't want to.

Those are all sins and are bad enough. But that Bible verse is not talking about sins. It says, "All our RIGHTEOUS ACTS are like filthy rags." Even when we do right, it is like a filthy rag. Even when we do good, it is like a filthy rag. We don't do enough that is right. We do good but for selfish reasons. Now, think of God. God is holy. He is perfectly good and perfectly right. He never does bad and He always does good. He does everything that is right and He always does what is good out of love for others. When we compare our supposedly "good" actions with His, then they are truly like "filthy rags". And if our righteous acts are like filthy rags, then what are our sinful acts like? They are even worse – worse than filthy and worse than rags.

Our "filthy rags" lives earn us punishment - a one-way trip to hell. Jesus came here to change all of that. He came to change us and our lives. He came to accept our punishment for us. Jesus accepted cloth - purple robe - and all the mocking and persecution as the punishment for our sins. He accepted crucifixion - death on the cross - as the payment for our wrongs.

But that's not all. When He had died, Jesus accepted another cloth -- a burial cloth. Several of His friends wrapped Jesus in a plain white cloth and put Him in a tomb. There Jesus did something even more wonderful for us. Three days later, a group of women came to prepare Jesus body for final burial and what did they find? They found only the cloth. Jesus' body was not there. He had risen from the dead to new life. Jesus had overcome death and left behind an empty cloth.

This cloth (picture) and the empty burial cloth has wonderful meaning for each one of you. You have a wonderful new "cloth" for yourselves. The Bible says, "I will greatly rejoice in the

Lord;...He has covered me with a robe of righteousness." (Isaiah 61:10) Notice that: the Bible says that we have a "robe of righteousness." What does that mean? Another verse says, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:27) That means that when you were baptized, God changed you. Jesus' holy life covers you like a robe. Now, when God looks at you, He does not see your "filthy rags" - sins. God sees Jesus' holiness covering you. God is no longer angry with you because of your sin. God is pleased with you because of Jesus.

You and I are new people, different people, special people. We are now God's people clothed in Christ's righteousness. So, let's live that way. Don't use your former "filthy rags" as an excuse for continuing in sin. Those are gone in God's eyes. You have the robe of righteousness covering you now. God the Son earned it for you on the cross. God the Father gave it to you in your Baptism. God the Holy Spirit has helped you to receive it. That means you don't have to worry, "Am I doing good enough? Will God punish me?" Jesus suffering and death cancelled that sin. You don't have to fear death and punishment. Jesus rising from the dead changed that. You too shall overcome death and live forever.

We are now free. We are free and empowered to avoid sin and evil. We are free and inspired to live for the Lord and do good. Our new nature (self) wants to do those things. Do what is right. Do what is good. Do what is helpful. Continue to love each other, be kind to one another, and help one another with the help and power of the Holy Spirit.

As you leave tonight, I want you to remember this picture of the cloth. Remember this as a symbol of love. Jesus' cloth – the purple robe before Pilate and the plain cloth on the cross - meant punishment for Jesus, but He accepted that and all the other suffering and even death because of His love for you. Remember that His holiness covers you and all your sins like a bright shiny robe. God has declared you to be holy. Now, go and live like holy people. And may God help you, support you, inspire you and empower through the Holy Spirit to do that. Amen.