

Sermon for January 13, 2013 – 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Titus 3:4-8

Theme: God's Great Shower of Grace

- 1) *washed us from our past*
- 2) *cleansed us for our future*
- 3) *purified us for our present*

⁴ *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸ This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

I love hot showers. If I am cold or dirty, sore or stressed out, sad or depressed, a hot shower makes me feel much better. The heat of the water pounding on my muscles relaxes them. The uniform noise clears my mind. The hot mist helps me breathe. When I step out of a shower, I feel like a new and better person: clean and refreshed.

In many ways baptism is like a hot shower, only infinitely better. Before our baptism we were dirty with the deeds of the world. The grease and grime of materialism, lust, and pride stained us to such a degree that we could never clean ourselves. Before God called us to faith in his Son, we were full of sin. We could not change ourselves. We were lost.

But then Christ appeared. He offered us a shower that would spiritually clean, comfort, and revive us – a shower that would not only make us feel like new, but would actually make us new.

Let us then, with the Apostle Paul as our guide, consider Baptism under the theme: **God's Great Shower of Grace**. It has: 1) *washed us from our past*, 2) *cleansed us for our future*, and 3) *purified us for our present*.

Part One: Washed us from our passed.

Our sermon text for this morning is from Paul's letter to a young pastor named Titus. In this letter he encourages Titus to: *Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, ² to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men. (Titus 3:1-2)*

Being a pastor myself, I can appreciate what Paul wanted Titus to accomplish. But if I were Titus, I could imagine myself asking Paul: "But how do I do this? How do I move the members of my congregation to be peaceable and considerate to one another?"

Paul, anticipating this question, tells Titus this answer: remind the people of what they were before they knew Christ, and what God has declared them to be in Christ.

Paul says: ³ *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. (Titus 3:3)* Before God called us to faith in His Son, we all lived as the people of this world live: envying what others have and always wanting more; holding grudges and lusting after pleasure. We lived for ourselves. We were soiled in sin and without any hope of being saved. This is what we were, until God came to offer us his great shower of grace.

⁴ *But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (Titus 3:4-5)*

I want to pause here and speak about two beautiful words in verse four: kindness and love. The word kindness is related to the word grace. A kind person is someone who loves others. A kind person treats us with the respect that many times we don't deserve. A kind person builds us up and seems always ready to lend a helping hand.

The word translated in our text as "love" is really the word "philanthropy" – that is a love for humanity. Our God loved humanity so much that he sent His one and only Son to take on the very nature of a human in order to save us from our sins. Jesus is God's kindness and love personified! He is where God and man meet together.

Yes, when the kindness and love of God - when Jesus - appeared, he saved us. He did not save us because we deserved it. Outside of Christ, we are filthy, dirty, and morally corrupt. He saved us because He loved us. He lived the perfect life we failed to live in order to fulfill the righteousness we need to stand before God. He died for our sins on the cross, suffering the punishment we deserved.

And He gives us the benefits of this work in baptism, as we read: *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:6).* Baptism is God's great Shower of Grace. We enter the water dirty and grimy with sin, violent and unlovable. We leave completely cleansed of all our sin, loved by God and adopted into his family.

"How can the water of baptism do this?" you might ask. It is not the water that does it, but rather God's Gospel promise connected with baptism. And what is this promise? That our sins are forgiven, that God has written His name on our hearts and adopted us into his family, and that the Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us – marking us as His dearly loved children through faith.

There is another word I want to look at in more detail, and that word is: "renewal". Remember how I talked about how a hot shower makes me feel like a new person? Well, in baptism we don't just feel like a new person, we are a new person.

The word translated as "renew" in our text is a word that some ancient Greeks would use for a rebuilding project. Imagine a devastated city after a war. The renewal is the cleanup and rebuilding. A good illustration would be the Marshall Plan after World War Two that *renewed* Germany to a state which was better than before the war.

We have been devastated by sin, but through baptism we have undergone a cleansing. We have been spiritually reborn and the Holy Spirit is rebuilding us to be new and better people – the people that he himself declared us to be.

Part Two: cleansed us for our future

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Through baptism we have been justified from all sin. The word justified is a legal term. It means to be declared not guilty. According to the grace God showered upon us in Christ, we have been declared innocent of sin. We are clean in God's sight and have been chosen to inherit eternal life with Him in paradise

But eternal life is not the only thing we have been chosen to inherit. What else goes with it? God himself! Just think, we are God's heirs. He, himself is our inheritance. And this is not just some future hope, it is our present reality that can only be seen with the eyes of faith.

Through Baptism we are new people. We are God's children and heirs. Eternal life in God's house is our certain future. Because this is true, our lives take on a greater significance and purpose. Through baptism, we have been purified for the present.

Part Three: purified us for our present

Why did Paul just spend so much time talking about God's grace showered upon us in baptism? He tells us in this last verse of our text: *This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.*

Everything Paul reminded us of - our sin, our cleansing from sin through our Savior's great love, and our eternal future - he did so that we might devote ourselves to God. Jesus saved us for a purpose: He wants us to show the world that we are different and new. He wants us to love each other as he has loved us, submit to authority as he submitted, and love his Father's Word as he loved it and lived it. In other words, Jesus saved us so that we might glorify God by devoting ourselves to love and good works. He wants us to live for each other – and not for ourselves.

Now, let's be clear: our good works do not earn heaven; rather they show that heaven is already ours. Our good works do not make us children of God but declare that this is what we already are. God is glorified when we live as his children – dedicated to his word and loving others. His salvation is proclaimed, and people start inquiring about the hope that we have.

But there are times when we get dirty, aren't there? There are times when we fall into sin, when we serve ourself, when we lash out in anger, when we feel the burden of guilt. What then? My advice: take a shower. Take the shower of God's grace. This doesn't mean that you have to be rebaptized. It means that you should remember the lasting significance you baptism has for your daily life, which Martin Luther so wonderfully summarized in His small Catechism: *[Baptism] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*

Yes, the significance of remembering our baptisms everyday means that we can take a shower of God's grace, know that we have been washed clean completely through Christ, and that we are new, reborn and dearly loved children of God, sealed by the Spirit and heirs of heaven. Knowing this, we will live for our LORD – proclaiming His salvation with our mouth and hands as we live according to His will. Amen.