



Sermon, Sunday August 1, 2021 “Restore Me to Yourself”

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 51:1-12 ¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment. ⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. ⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.

SERMON

The message today will start with a glimpse into the way that I prepare. Pastor Paul, hopefully, has a more organized method, one with a disciplined, studious process.

On Saturday, yesterday, around 3pm, I came to the conclusion that I had no paper to write this message on. Yes, I am that old fashioned, so off to the store for a tablet and two Pepsis to fuel the brain cells that are still functioning.

Now, with supplies to accomplish the task, I returned home and started to do laundry, then I put groceries in the fridge and settled down to compose this message. Oops, the wash needs to be put in the dryer; where are the dryer sheets? And quarters?

Once again seated at my desk, I think about the pastoral prayer and work on that, which, because I like to be current on events, may not have been what you heard earlier.

The first item to be addressed is: what is "hyssop"?

Google time. This plant is a shrub of the mint family native to Southern Europe and the Middle East. It is used as an antiseptic, cough reliever and expectorant. The Jews used it in prefatory sprinkling rites.

So, hyssop is used to ritually clean one for religious rites, like baptism. And who among us couldn't use some of that?

So for the ultimate religious rite, to be in the presence of the Lord God, that would require some serious cleaning. Especially for those of us who exist in the material world.

Hey, second load to go into the washer, detergent? Quarters? Keys to the laundry room?

Back at the desk.

Let's think about Psalm 51.

This is David's plea to God after the prophet Nathan confronts him about the Uriah and Bath-Sheba. David knew how badly he had sinned against God. And David knew that it would take a near miracle to restore his relationship with God. And David pleads for God to provide that miracle. Only God and God alone could overlook the behavior of David. To seduce a married woman, impregnate her and have her



husband killed. That is a lot to forgive. At least two commandments are broken, that one about coveting your neighbor's wife and possessions, and the one about killing. It's probably going to take a lot of God's ability to forgive on that one.

Here's where humans don't always understand God. There is this list of do's and don'ts, written by God. Ten things that humans have always had trouble following. But if we break one of them, God forgives us. That's not to say that there won't be consequences. An indeterminist amount of time in hell, time out for bad behavior, then God forgives and brings us back into his presence. Welcomed home and given all the riches that we've squandered.

The filthy clothes of our sinful life and the slime and stench that cling to us are gone. All washed away and replaced with clean, minty fresh, white garments; the sort of clean and white that cannot exist on earth with humans.

The unimaginable clean of heaven - the kind of clean that we cannot comprehend. Dazzling white and perfumed. And our fore bearers, unable to dream of our level of clean, they would be totally astonished by the clean of heaven.

No dust, no animal stuff everywhere. That rain would turn into a fine layer of sludge and spread that a foot or so up the exterior of everything - walls, doors, everyone's clothes and your feet.

Living in the past would have you looking forward to the cleanliness of the Psalms. Heaven it would be to be clean longer than the first step out of the bathing pool.

David realized that Nathan knew of his sins, and was one who would use his life to say it out loud. David knew that the rest of Jerusalem knew as well, and maybe Israel as well.

David needs to plead to God for forgiveness. And he turns to the Psalms, where he can remain anonymous but let the people see that he is contrite; the place that can plead for all of Israel and not admit his own guilt. David knows that only God can provide him with forgiveness, that only God, not the Rabbis, Priests, or the Sanhedrin are capable of cleansing him.

He cries out to God, "Make me whole, erase my sins, and purge my evil deeds.

And God, who can see into David's heart, sees that he is sincere and forgives him.

David, who has failed God before and has been welcomed back into God's presence, the same David who would fail God many times and be forgiven each time. He is a metaphor for Israel and us. We seem to always fall short of our own expectations, let alone God's wishes for us. Yet God always runs to greet us on that long road to redemption, where we are greeted with hugs, kisses, a feast and a freshened soul.

This is the story that is told and retold throughout the Bible. Sin and redemption, misdeed and forgiveness, and God always welcomes us home, lets us know that we are unconditionally loved, giving to us a renewed soul and a sparkling new outlook on life.

Now, our sins are hopefully not as egregious as David's, but still a life time of mistakes, sins and bad behavior do add up to the need for forgiveness and repentance. When we've asked forgiveness of our past, it does us no good to return to the muck that is that modern material world. We have to set our feet on the narrow path that keeps us in God's grace. But we seem to keep yo-yoing away from and back to the presence of Go. Yet we are welcomed back every time.

I don't think that God's forgiveness is an open invitation to live a wanton life or to live as if life has no consequences here on earth, and there are still the punishments of the afterlife.

So be of good cheer, live your life to the best, remembering that God loves you and will forgive you, when you ask for it.

