Good Friday

Matthew 27:24-26

**24**So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.” **25**And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” **26**Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

There are 3 great ironies in this passage, one from Pilate’s final response and one from those people who wanted Jesus dead, and the biggest one is the crucifixion itself. Here, Pilate declares himself to be innocent of Jesus’ blood. But is that really true? Initially, we see that he did try to release Jesus but when the crowd pressed hard on him, he gave in. His wife tried to persuade him but to no avail. Finally, he washes his hands in some water to show to the people that he is innocent. But can such water wash him clean, can such water give him a clear conscience? The irony is that from very early on, for the past 1800 years the church has confessed that Jesus died under Pontius Pilate, as we too confess every week with all Christians across the world according to both the Apostle’s and the Nicene Creed. His name is forever associated with the death of Jesus. He could not escape from his guilt.

But with his symbolic washing of the hands and with what the crowd declared, it seems as if the guilt has been transferred upon the Jews instead. The people said to Pilate, “His blood be on us and on our children!” and this is the second irony. Did they really know what they said? This is basically the same thing as when God made his covenant with Moses and the Israelites on mount Sinai. When Moses read the book of the covenant with all the laws and statutes of God, the people responded by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” (Ex24:7) and Moses threw the blood on the people. That was the old covenant. And we all know how the story developed, the people complained and grumbled and were disobedient, not just during the exodus, but throughout their entire history. No one has kept the law, none of them were obedient as they should. And now once again, with the blood of the new covenant, the blood of Jesus, they have become disobedient again.

Disobedience and guilt are always before them, but is this not also true for us? We are all guilty of Jesus blood for it is our sins, our disobedience, our rebellion, our grumbling, it is our unbelief that ultimately put Jesus on the cross to die. We killed him and we cannot wash our sins away. Even if we have the best intention like Pilate, there is nothing we can do to clear our conscience. It did not work for him and it will not work for us.

There is no water or anything in this world that can wash away our sins except what God has instituted for that very purpose. The third irony, or perhaps a paradox is a better term here, is that at the cross both water and blood was poured out exactly for the purpose of cleansing and to wash away our evil consciences. Indeed, our God died because of our sins, but at the same he willingly died in our place to forgive sins. There on the cross, he declares, “It is finished.” Though it may have been just a whisper due to his weakened state, this declaration rings throughout all the earth, even reaching the heavens and deep down below.

Pilate is washed clean not because of his good intention and a basin of water, the Jews are forgiven by the blood of Jesus not because of their obedience and zeal for the law of Moses, but only because God’s good will toward men and there’s life for them only because Jesus was obedient, even to the point of death on the cross. But would Pilate believe? Would the Jews believe? Pilate thought his own little act and his declaration was enough, but it was not. The Jews simply did not believe and thought that they were doing the right thing in killing a blasphemer. Do we believe then, that this man on the cross is able to declare us not guilty, we who put him on the cross for our sins? Do we believe too that his death on the cross actually gives us true obedience and perfect righteousness, so that God actually sees us a completely righteous?

Our only confidence is in his words, words found throughout the entire bible, throughout his ministry, and here on the cross, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” and then he says, “it is finished.” Our confidence, as some of you have heard in yesterdays’ epistle reading, is only found in the blood of Jesus. The salvation of mankind, the forgiveness of sins was achieved when he shed his blood for us. The blood that flows from this cross is the new covenant through which we have full assurance and full confidence that our sins are washed away.

And so today, good Friday, we must remember and look at the cross with faith, not brushing it off as if it is not related to you, as if you are not guilty of anything, our sins have put Jesus on the cross. But see too in faith that your sins are indeed nailed to the cross, your eternal death has been endured by Jesus and three days he will rise again, conquering sin, death, and the devil. This is the greatest miracle, for with his stripes we are healed, forever.