

Ash Wednesday

Text: John 1:29

Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Theme: Where Are Your Sins?

Martin Luther once made the following observation regarding this verse, **"This is the foundation of our faith, that we know where our sins have been laid. There are only two places where they could be: either around your neck or on Christ, the Lamb of God. If they are on your back, you're lost; but if they are on Christ, you are free and saved. Now take which ever one you will."** [Stöckhardt, *Biblische Geschichte* p. 28] During this season of Lent we often reflect on our sinfulness and our need for a Savior. The problem is that quite often we stop there. It becomes a season that makes us feel guilty. We are made to feel that we killed Jesus. We made him suffer and die. We do see our sinfulness, and we confess our sins, but today John points us to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Our sins are no longer on our backs. Christ wants to bear them in our place. On this Ash Wednesday I would like to ask, "Where are your sins?"

I. Without Christ our sins are around our own necks.

They are on our necks if we fail to confess them. When the crowds of people came to John the Baptist, he was not shy. He was blunt about their sins. He even said, *"You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?"* He told King Herod that he should not have taken his brother's wife. God's Word convicted those people of their sins.

The Law continues to convict us of our sins today also. When we think of the 10 Commandments, we realize that we have not put God first all the time, that we have misused His name, that worship has not always been a priority, that we have not always honored those who have authority over us, that we have hurt and harmed others by our words and actions, that we have not always led a sexually pure and decent life, that we have found ways to take what belonged to others, that we have not always been truthful, and that we have often desired what belonged to someone else. God's law tells us that we are guilty. We are not perfect. We have sinned in thought, word, and deed.

What do we do when God's law convicts us of our sins? King Herod killed the messenger. He ended up having John executed. Jesus also made many enemies when He was clear about the sins of the people. Steven was stoned when he convicted the people of their hardness of heart. Our sins continue to hang around our necks when we deny them, make excuses for them or harm those who point them out to us by our words or actions. If we fail to confess our sins, we deceive ourselves. We think that we are good people, when we are carrying filthy, stinking sins, which eventually everyone around us will come to see. They are there, but we simply deny them.

They are on our necks if we fail to trust in God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. Many people feel the weight of their sins. They know that they are there. Their guilt is a great burden. But they continue to bear that guilt, and it wears them down. The most difficult person to forgive is often ourselves. We walk around with a tremendous burden, "Why did I do that?" "How could I have been so dumb?" Judas was such a person. He had great remorse that he betrayed Jesus. He was very contrite. But contrition on its own is deadly. Judas ended up hanging himself. The burden of our guilt is more than we can bear. If we try to bear it, we will end up destroying ourselves.

II. As Christians we give those sins to Christ.

John calls Him the Lamb of God. The only places in the Bible when Jesus is called the Lamb of God is in this first chapter of John. However, He is simply called "The Lamb" 30 times in the book of Revelation. For instance Revelation 7:14 says, *"These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."* 1 Peter 1:18,19 also says with regard to Him, *"¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."*

This phrase "The Lamb of God" also reminds us of several Old Testament stories, such as the Lamb that was offered in Isaac's place, the Passover Lamb, the Scapegoat who carried away the sins of the people or the prophesy of the Lamb in Isaiah 53 of whom it says, *"The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* Lambs were often offered as sacrifices for the sins of the people. Jesus is the Lamb of God who came to bear all of our sins.

That is the point of this Lenten season. We recognize our sins and confess them, but then we are called to behold Christ who takes away our sins. We remember that the price of our salvation was not cheap. Christ was the Lamb without blemish or defect. He was perfect. He had no sin. Then He offered His sinless life in our place on the cross. He allowed Himself to be falsely accused, whipped, and beaten. When the people mocked Him and challenged Him to come down from the cross, He stayed. Unlike Isaac God didn't yell "Stop" from heaven when the nails were about to pierce His Son's flesh. He offered His Son, the Son whom He loves, as the sacrifice for all of our sins. Christ willing gave His life on Calvary's cross to bear all of our sins.

As Christians we behold Him as our Savior. We confess our sins, take them from our necks and place them on Christ. That is what He wants us to do. He wants us to place our sins on Him. He came to free us from the guilt and burden of our sins. When we behold Him on that cross, we are beholding our Savior. When we come to this altar and receive His body and blood, we are doing that in remembrance of His sacrifice for our sins on the cross. We trust that Jesus Christ paid for all of our sins in full on the cross. We know that in Holy Baptism He took away all of our sins personally. They have been washed away, just like dirt is washed off of our bodies because Christ has taken them away.

Where are your sins? They are around your neck if you refuse to confess them, if you deny them or make excuses for them. They are also around your neck if you feel their weight, but still live in guilt. Today God is calling us to behold His Lamb who takes away our sins. Confess your sins, and place them on Christ. He came to bear them in your place. That forgiveness is God's gift to you, a gift that cost a very high price, the life of His Son. The foundation of our faith is that we know where sins are. They are no longer around our necks. Christ has taken them for us. He has carried them away, and raise us to a new life in Him through His resurrection of the dead and our baptism in His name. May God fill our lives with that comfort and peace to know that our sins are no longer around our necks, but that Christ, the Lamb of God has taken them away.

Amen.

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