

It Is Time to Clean Up

Scripture Readings: James 4:4 – 10 and Jeremiah 29:10 – 14

This message came about from a sign that has been next to our front door of the Chapel since the pandemic started. For 18 months we have passed this sign. I wonder if you noticed it? Here is the sign

(Show sign) *‘Wash your hands & say your prayers because Jesus & germs are everywhere’* a nice lesson from our pandemic.

With what we have gone through for 18 months I thought this story about washing hands would make sense. Two little children were at a sink cheerfully washing their hands. They were singing aloud – ‘The Happy Birthday’ song two times through. They had been taught during Covid 19. If you wash your hands while singing the ‘Happy Birthday’ twice, you have washed your hands long enough! (Demonstrate)

It takes that long to wash away all the germs. At least that was what their mother told them. So maybe we learned something good during Covid 19! It takes time to clean dirt off of our hands!

Keeping things clean can be a tedious process, as we have learned during this pandemic. During the pandemic, I would believe each of you washed your hands A LOT!

(Rub my hands together and sing ‘Happy Birthday’ song twice)

Scrubbing away your sins can be just as tedious. We need to wash away our sins by following the focused steps back to God.

In our reading from the Book of James, James urges believers in Jesus Christ scattered throughout the Roman Empire to turn their focus back to God. James also urges us, modern day believers in Jesus Christ, at this time to focus back on God.

In the Apostle James' time, Christians were beset by quarrels and fights. They battled for one-upmanship. They fought over possessions. They fought over worldly things, worldly pleasures, money, and recognition which made them an enemy of God. James warned them, he said – *'Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you who are double-minded.'*

James is also talking to us; we are beset by quarrels and fights, just look at the news! We battled for one-upmanship, just look at our politics! We fight over possessions. We fight over worldly things, worldly pleasures, money, and recognition which makes us an enemy of God. James warns us – *'Submit ourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from us. Wash our hands, us sinners, and purify our hearts, we who are double-minded.'*

How? You may ask? James says – *'Come near to God and He will come near to you.'* These are cleaning words. These are sanitizing words which describe the necessity of turning to God so that we can be scoured clean of the soil of sin from our lives.

James goes further, when he explains the cleaning method. He says – *'Grieving, mourning, and wailing will change to laughter and your joy will bloom! Humble yourself before the Lord and he will lift you up.'* Dealing with our sin is humbling, but our God is faithful to turn our washing into worship. God will clean us of grieving, mourning, and crying. God will change it to laughter and joy.

Dealing with your sin is humbling, but our God is faithful to turn your washing into worship. God will clean you of grieving, mourning, and crying. God will change it to laughter and joy. Let us be honest, cleaning sin away from us is very hard. I am sure there are places in our lives where sin persist. Each of us need to turn back to God and let Him clean us up! (Demonstrate)

Let us greet this news with a loud 'Hallelujah!'

Now let us talk about our hearing. First a good story:

President Franklin D. Roosevelt often endured long receiving lines at the White House. FDR often complained that no one paid attention to what he said as they passed through the receiving line. So FDR decided to do an experiment at one such reception. FDR did this to everyone who passed down the line – he would shake their hand and say – *'I murdered my grandmother this morning!'* Every guest would respond with phrases like – 'Marvelous sir, keep up the good job!' or 'God bless you sir!' These kind of responses continued until at the end of the receiving line the ambassador from Bolivia came up to greet FDR. He listened to FDR's words - *'I murdered my grandmother this morning!'* He actually heard FDR words and he leaned forward and whispered in FDR's ear – 'I am sure she had it coming!'

Do you wonder if people are really listening? Or worse, do you fear that they are? I do each and every Sunday that I give a message. I wonder if people are listening. I will often look around the church to see if anyone is listening. I can remember a local volunteer fireman was in church one Sunday when I looked around the church in a silent moment and he had his head back and mouth open. He was snoring, he sure was not listening. His wife elbowed him and he woke up startled. He nodded at me and his lips moved to say – I am sorry! After the service he told me that he was up all last night fighting a barn fire not far from town. Oh yes, I very often wonder if you are listening!

Doing a YouTube service makes it impossible to see if you are listening, but some of you respond to the message through email or text message or phone call – THANK YOU! Some of you are listening! In fact, I will like to hear from our 43 subscribers to our YouTube services. Please share any questions or your thoughts on our YouTube services. I would also like to thank you for viewing and share some information about our church.

Do you wonder if God is listening? We can tell if people are listening based on their responses or eye contact. But how do we know if God is listening? Should we rely on feelings or should we wait to see if God answers our prayers? We cannot know if God is listening through his response or eye contact because our God is unseen.

In our scripture reading from the Book of Jeremiah, we find that after 70 years of exile in Babylon, God promised to bring His people back to Jerusalem and to secure their future. When the people of Israel called upon Him, God heard their cries. The people of Israel in Babylon knew that God heard their prayers because God promised to listen.

And, my friends, the same is true for us – God has promised to listen. We do not need to rely on feelings or to wait for a sign to know that God listens to us! God has promised to listen and God always keeps his promises!

Let me repeat that - God has promised to listen and God always keeps his promises!

Have you felt in your life that God was NOT listening? A man was married to a nurse and they had three young children. She worked tirelessly at the local hospital and she volunteered for many organizations to supply any medicals needs they needed. She was very active in her church and most people called her a 'saint'. One morning driving to work, a drunk driver ran head first into her. She was killed instantly and the drunk driver only suffered minor injuries.

Her husband came into the church to pray the next day. The minister saw him in the church crying and praying so he walked over to the grieving man. He sat next to him in the pew. The husband asked the minister a one-word question – WHY? He shared with the minister that he was very angry with the drunk driver and he asked why God didn't take him instead of his wife. The minister prayed with the man and after he was done, the husband shared that his wife always told him that God was listening. The minister and the husband cried together!

Several months later, the husband came back into the church alone to pray. The minister again came to him to talk with him. The husband shared that he had come to find that God does listen to prayers because the life they had built together was a sign of God's grace, mercy, and love. He also shared with the minister that he had visited with the drunk driver who killed his wife first out of anger and now he had convinced the man to join AA and he was helping others with addictions. His three children were active in church before their mom's death but now they were very active in the youth group and they started a support group for youth who have lost a parent at their school.

God promises to listen and God always keeps his promises!

Let us pray:

Holy God, thank you that your cleaning methods that purifying us from sins and drawing us to you. Please wash our hands, wash our souls, and purify our hearts. Let us return to you in praise.

Dear God, thank you for hearing our prayers though we may sometimes doubt it. Help us to trust your promise that you listen to us

AMEN.