

## SHOW YOUR DIRTY HANDS

14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.” 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God. (read during lessons)

In our Gospel lesson from John chapter 3, Jesus was speaking to a Pharisee who was also a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. His name was Nicodemus. We see traps set by the Pharisees throughout the Gospels—they liked to invite Jesus to their homes for banquets and then try to stump the Lord with questions. But Nicodemus was different. Nicodemus did not call Jesus to come to him, he sought Jesus out. He came at night, privately and quietly, maybe for fear of other Jews finding out about the meeting, but I think mainly to be able to speak with Jesus frankly without any of his brother Pharisees turning all of the Lord’s words upside down. You see, Nicodemus was being brought to faith, and he was facing a **crisis** of faith.

Jesus used a Bible story from the history of Moses and the Jews during their years of wandering to illustrate faith. It’s from Numbers chapter 21.<sup>a</sup> When Israel was traveling around the perimeter of Edom, they complained about life in the desert, and God sent venomous serpents to bite them and inflict pain and suffering, and commanded Moses to cast a bronze snake and put it high on a pole, so that anyone who looked at it would be healed. This was to teach Israel to trust in God for everything, and Jesus says that in the same way, he was going to be lifted up on the cross so that everyone who looked to him in faith would be healed of their sin.

Jesus holds out this promise in a couple of ways.<sup>b</sup> The first is this in verse 15 and 16, **That those who believe have eternal life.** How? Because God loved the world so much that he gives eternal life to whoever puts their faith in his Son. **In verses 17 and 18, he puts it the opposite way:** God’s love for the world is this: That he didn’t send his Son to condemn the world (as so many people feared and still fear), but he sent his Son to save the world. So anyone who believes is not condemned at all. (vs. 14-18).

<sup>a</sup> The chapters numbered “21” in Moses all relate to the life of Christ: Gen 21, the birth of the promised child; Ex 21, an eye for an eye; Lev 21, a priest must be holy to serve; Num 21, the bronze snake, and Dt 21, “Do not leave a dead body hanging overnight on a tree...”

<sup>b</sup> Some editors end Jesus’ words at verse 15.

Only faith in Jesus Christ saves. This faith trusts in Jesus, who paid the price for our sins on the cross. We had a wedding shower here in the fellowship hall on Saturday, and the bride's aunt paid the fee for the hall rental. I jotted down a note for our bookkeeper and clipped it to the payment. Five minutes later, the bride's mother came in with the same payment, which I refused—it was already paid; there's nothing owed anymore. That's our status before God with our sins. They are paid for, and there is nothing we could bring that would improve or change that payment. It's all done. Paid in full. Trust in Jesus who made that payment, and thank him—that trust and thanks on the one hand is the Christian's life of faith, and on the other hand is the Christian's life of thankful, faithful living.

This is wonderful. This is a miraculous teaching, from Jesus to Nicodemus and also to you and me. But Jesus knows that sometimes we need to hear something more than once or more than one way to really get it, and so he switches from faith and forgiveness to light and dark.

Jesus says: “This is the *crisis*.” Our translations say “verdict,” but the Greek word *crisis* (κρίσις) means both a judgment as in a verdict, and the turning point in a fever or a disease—the moment that is so important that everything in the future will turn on this very point, and that's why Jesus calls it a *crisis*: That **light** has come into the **world**, but men loved darkness instead because their deeds were evil.

There is no **crisis** more serious than this. And Jesus wants us to understand this. Think of your sins, your guilt. Think of it in terms of light and dark. The light is life, it is forgiveness, it is heaven; it is Jesus himself. The darkness is everything that blots the light, everything that kills the life, everything that obscures the forgiveness offered to us. The darkness is anything and everything that is not heaven, but in eternity, everything is heaven except for hell. The darkness is anything and everything that turns away from Jesus Christ.

And Jesus explains something here that John said at the beginning of the book. Do you remember John chapter 1? We read that every year on Christmas Day, it's the Christmas Gospel. One of the first verses is this: “**The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it**” (John 1:5). Darkness—sin, corruption, misunderstanding, rejection of Jesus and the Gospel—darkness “has not understood the light.” We need to keep that in mind as we contemplate what Jesus is asking us, inviting us to do here.

Jesus says, “**Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.**” When I was a little boy, I had a small turtle that I tried to keep as a pet for a while. We kept it in a box under an outside stairway, and I gave it water and lettuce, but every time I handled it, my mom would say, “Wash your hands or you'll get salmonella.” I didn't know what salmonella was—maybe a boring flavor of ice cream—but being a little boy, I didn't want to always be washing my hands. Fortunately, my mother knew me, and knew the way I think. She told me, either I had to keep washing my hands, or I had to let the turtle go. Otherwise, I was going to get very, very sick. And in the end, the turtle got set free, and I think he lived in our garden after that. But I remember hiding my hands from my mom so that she wouldn't know whether I had picked up that turtle—and of course, if her son hid her hands, she already knew.

So Jesus leaves a question unasked but obvious: *Why won't you show God your dirty hands?* What sin is it, sinner, that you are trying to hold to hold on to? Do you have an addiction or a temptation or some regular, dear sin that you're so unwilling to give up that you're willing to risk hell in order to hang onto it? Salmonella? **Hellmonella!**

You're going to get a lot more than sick if you hang keep hiding your filthy hands from your Father God and if you refuse to give up that nagging, tenacious, backsliding sin that's got you by the throat and won't let you go.

But Jesus invites us into the light. He doesn't coerce us, or push or force us or cheat us to get us there—those are the tools of the Enemy. He invites us, with love and forgiveness and friendship. “Come into the light.”

The darkness doesn't understand the light because the darkness thinks that there is only judgment there. But what is there. You Christian! You baptized, confirmed (maybe), believing, trusting, faithful Christian! What is in the light for you?

Proof! Proof that “that it may be seen plainly that what you have done **has been done through God.**” It isn't your work that gets judged. It's God's work. It's the Son, lifted up on the cross like Moses' bronze snake, for healing, for repair, to atone for our sins, even that nagging, tenacious, backsliding sin that's got you by the throat and won't let you go.

That feeling of terror, that God won't forgive—that's the devil's lie you hear. The devil speaks with different voices sometimes and I'm afraid that he might be speaking to you out of your own throat. But step into the light and let the devil shriek. Let his lies go **poof** so that the light of God can give you **proof** of what Jesus has done for us all.

The only thing that damns is unbelief. That only thing that saves is faith.

So don't be afraid to show your dirty hands to Jesus your Savior. He won't scold you. He won't lop them off. He washes them clean so that your sins won't make you sick with the devil's poison and nonsense.

What a wonderful God we have, **who gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.** Amen.