

Sermon for January 12, 2025 – 1st Sunday after Epiphany

Titus 3:4-8 EHV

Theme: God's Renewing Shower of Grace

- 1) Washed you from your past
- 2) Cleansed you for your future
- 3) Purified you for your present

⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, ⁵he saved us— not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.

⁸This saying is trustworthy. And I want you to insist on these things, so that those who believe in God are intent on keeping busy with good works. These things are honorable and useful for the people.

When I feel cold, dirty, sore, stressed, or depressed, I take a hot shower. Why? Because the warm water hitting my body, combined with its steady sound and soothing mist, helps me relax. By the time I step out of the shower, I feel like a completely new person—clean and refreshed.

As renewing as a hot shower can be, it pales in comparison to what God does for us through Holy Baptism. Our sins have stained us so thoroughly that we lost the image of God with which He created humanity. Recognizing the guilt of our sins fills us with shame, sorrow, and fear as we contemplate the everlasting punishment we deserve.

However, God the Father has such underserved love for us that He sent Jesus to forgive our sins. Through Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit connects us to Christ's sacrificeⁱ and cleanses us from sin so thoroughly that we don't just feel rejuvenated—we are actually made holy and new!

With the Apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider the blessing of Baptism under the theme: **God's Renewing Shower of Grace that** 1) washed you from your past, 2) cleansed you for your future, and 3) purified you for your present.

Part One: Washed you from your past.

Our sermon text comes from a letter the apostle Paul wrote to encourage a young pastor named Titus in his ministry. Concerning the people God entrusted to his care, the apostle tells Titus: *Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready to do any good work, ²to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, to be gentle, and to display every courtesy toward all people.*ⁱⁱ

As a pastor, I can appreciate what Paul wanted Titus to do. However, if I were Titus, I could imagine myself asking Paul: “How do I accomplish this when sinful pride lurks in every human heart, including my own?”

Anticipating that question, Paul told Titus to remind the people of who they were before they knew Jesus, and of who God declared them to be in Christ now.

He wrote: ³*For at one time we ourselves were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by many kinds of evil desires and pleasures, living in malice and jealousy, being hated and hating one another.*ⁱⁱⁱ Before God brought us to faith in His Son, we were selfish, self-serving, and lost in sin. Rather than bearing the image of God, we bore the image of sinful Adam. Like the rest of the world, we lived under the influence of the devil. This truth was evident not only in our contempt for God but also in how we treated each other. We were selfish and spiritually lost until God showered us with grace.

⁴*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, ⁵he saved us—not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy.*

I want to pause here to highlight two beautiful words: kindness and love. The word “kindness” is related to the word “grace.” A kind person is good to you, even when you don’t deserve it, striving to help and benefit you with their words and actions.

The word translated as “love” is literally the Greek word philanthropy,” meaning love for humanity. Our God loved humanity so much that He gave His only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.^{iv} Jesus is the embodiment of God’s kindness and love!

Therefore, when Jesus—God’s kindness and love—appeared, He saved us. Why? Because we deserved it? Absolutely not! Without Christ, we are spiritually filthy and morally corrupt; so much so that *all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth*^v in God’s sight. The only reason God chose to save us is *because of His mercy*. And what a great mercy it is! Jesus lived the perfect life in obedience to God’s commands that we failed to live, fulfilling the righteousness we need to stand before Him. He suffered and died on the cross, so completely paying for our sins that God the Father must acquit us for Jesus’ sake.

The Holy Spirit applies the benefits of Christ’s work to us through Holy Baptism, as we read: *He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior*. Baptism is God’s renewing shower of grace. We enter the water stained with sin, vile and unlovable, and we leave completely clean and forgiven. We become so new that God calls it a “rebirth.” Our past selfishness and slavery to sin no longer define us. Through Baptism, we become God’s holy children, clothed in Christ’s righteousness.

You might ask, “How can the water of baptism do this?” It is not the water itself that does it, but God’s Gospel promise connected with baptism. And what promise is that? It is that God, through

Christ, forgives our sins and adopts us into His family, sending the Holy Spirit to mark us as His dearly loved children through faith.^{vi}

There is another word I want to explore in more detail: “renewal.” Remember how I said that a hot shower makes me feel like a new person? Well, Holy Baptism doesn’t just make us feel like a new person; it actually makes us new.

The word translated as “renew” in our text is a term that some ancient Greeks would use for a rebuilding project. Imagine a place devastated by war, only to be rebuilt better than it was before—sort of like Germany after World War II under the Marshall Plan. If you can picture that, then you can understand what the Holy Spirit accomplishes in us as He connects us with Christ through Baptism: He cleanses our hearts, which have been devastated by sin, and rebuilds them to be His holy temple—completely pure and new!^{vii} Yes, Holy Baptism is God’s renewing shower of grace, which not only washes us clean from our past but also purifies us for our future, as our text indicates:

Part Two: Cleansed you for your future

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.

Because Baptism connects us to Christ and His redemptive death on our behalf, God justifies us from all sin. What does that mean? The term “justify” basically means to declare not guilty. Through Baptism, God declares us not guilty of sin. Why is this possible? Because Jesus graciously paid the full price for our sins. If God’s justice has been completely satisfied by what Jesus did, we are free to go—acquitted of all the devil’s accusations.

Since we are free from sin in God’s sight, we are also free to live with Him forever in the perfect paradise He is preparing for us.^{viii} Yes, God the Father has so thoroughly forgiven us in Jesus that He sent the Holy Spirit to mark us as co-heirs with Christ of God’s everlasting kingdom, glory, and presence.

Therefore, *according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*^{ix} The Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee that He will fulfil His promise and grant us everlasting life with him in paradise.^x

Yes, dear Christian, take comfort in God’s Renewing Shower of Grace that not only washed you from your past and cleansed you for your future, but has also purified you for living in the present.

Part Three: Purified you for your present

For what purpose did Paul write our sermon text, reminding us of the grace God showered upon us through Holy Baptism? Our last verse explains: ⁸*This saying is trustworthy. And I want you to*

insist on these things, so that those who believe in God are intent on keeping busy with good works. These things are honorable and useful for the people.

Everything God had the Apostle Paul write in our text was to encourage us to live as the people God declared us to be at our baptisms: His holy children, saved to reflect His love to the world through the good works He prepared for us to do.^{xi}

To be clear: our good works do not make us children of God and heirs of everlasting life. No, instead, they declare that we already have this new identity in Christ. How so? Because that is who God declared us to be at our baptisms when He put His name upon us. Since this is our identity, let us live as children of God by doing good works: loving the Father as Jesus loves the Father, and by loving people as Jesus loves them.

“But,” you might say, “even though I am baptized, I still find myself pursuing sin instead of my Saviour. The good I want to do, I don’t always do. Instead, I find myself doing the evil I don’t want to do. Does this mean I am not a Christian?”

No, it means that you still live in a sinful world and need God’s grace—just like everyone else! Every Christian experiences what you are going through. The Apostle Paul even wrote about his struggles in the Book of Romans.^{xii} However, this sinful nature that will cling to us until the day we die, is not who we truly are. Who we are is what God declared us to be in Christ at our baptisms: His purified and holy children.

That is why we should not view baptism as merely an event that happened in the past with no ongoing significance. No, your baptism has immense relevance for your life every day. It serves as a reminder of who you are in Christ, enabling you to live your life to God’s glory in the peace of His forgiveness and mercy. Luther explains the ongoing significance baptism has for us this way:

[Baptism] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

In other words, baptism is God’s renewing shower of grace that purifies our present. It empowers us to live for Christ, using our words and actions to glorify Him. How does this happen? When we remember our baptisms, we recall who God has declared us to be in Jesus: His dearly loved, forgiven children. In the peace of that truth, let us make every effort to honour our merciful Father in heaven with our words and actions, to the glory of His saving name.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, may the LORD lead you to always appreciate your baptisms, moving you to constantly bask in **His Renewing Shower of Grace**, which washed you from your past, cleansed you for your future, and purified you for your present. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Romans 6:3-11

ⁱⁱ Titus 3:1-2 EHV

ⁱⁱⁱ Titus 3:3 EHV

^{iv} Cf. John 3:16

^v Isaiah 64:4 EHV

^{vi} Cf. Act 2:28, Galatians 3:26-27, and 4:4-6

^{vii} Cf. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

^{viii} Cf. John 14:1-3

^{ix} 2 Peter 3:13

^x Cf. Ephesians 1:13-14 & 2 Corinthians 4:14

^{xi} Cf. Ephesians 2:10

^{xii} Cf. Romans 7:14 - 8:4