

SERMON FOR JANUARY 24, 2021

TEXT: 1 PETER 3: 18-19

THEME: HAVING A GOOD CONSCIENCE

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, **19** in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, **20** because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. **21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

In the name of Jesus:

I was a watcher of cartoons when I was growing up, and one of my favorite cartoon characters was Bugs Bunny. I remember one cartoon where Bugs was conflicted, and there, appearing on either shoulder was a devilish Bugs, tempting him to do what he shouldn't, and an angelic Bugs, telling him right from wrong. I don't remember how the situation turned out, but I remember seeing it and thinking as an adult how this explained the battle that goes on in a Christian's heart and life. As believers in Jesus, we have been given the Holy Spirit in our Baptism to live for Christ, and yet, a battle wages, daily, within our hearts as Satan and our sinful flesh tempts us to disobey God.

This is the spiritual warfare that we face today, not a battle between nations, but the battle and war that we face as Satan seeks to cause conflict in our hearts and lives. Satan seeks to dirty our conscience, while God has defeated Satan and has given you a clean conscience in Baptism, so that you might live your life to the glory of God in joy and peace.

God has written His Law on each person's heart. The conscience has been given to us by God to act as an umpire, calling balls and strikes, if you will, informing us if we are keeping or breaking God's Law. Because of sin, our consciences, though, have become sullied, dirty. We don't know exactly what God's Law is, so God gives us His Law a second time in the form of the Ten Commandments. Jesus summed up the Law with this: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

When you and I look at the Ten Commandments, and how we have sinned in thought, word and deed, we stand accused by God as sinners. We deserve nothing good from God, only His wrath and punishment. But God is gracious to us, He sent Jesus to be our Savior, He kept the law for us, and then gave Himself up as the payment for our sins in His death on the cross. The blood of Christ cleanses you from all sin. We receive God's grace in our

Baptism, our sins are forgiven, and we are certain of life everlasting because of what Jesus has done.

God has done all of this! Thanks be to God. But Satan, our wiley foe, does not rest. He is like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour. And he is at work, day and night, to attack us, to attack you and me, attacking our faith, our relationship and standing before the Father, and he does so by attacking and speaking to our conscience, trying his darndest to sow unbelief, doubt, and uncertainty. That is what the name Satan means, he is the accuser. He continues to accuse you of not being worthy of God's love.

This happens each and every day to everyone who believes in Jesus. Satan attacks in many ways but one way that he chiefly attacks today is by using shame. Shame is the intense feeling of pain or the experience of believing that we are flawed and unworthy of God's love. Satan speaks to our hearts and dirties our conscience, telling us that we are unloved, that we are never good enough, that God can't possibly love us, and by asking us the question: "Who do you think you are?"

Many today live in shame. Shame is covering up a mistake and then getting caught. Shame is getting the promotion, only to be demoted later because you weren't succeeding. Shame is someone calling you a loser in

front of others. The fear of being irrelevant is a trigger that Satan uses to cause us to be shamed.

But God's Good News is that He has taken on our shame in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the stone rejected by men. He was despised, crucified and forsaken by God on the cross. Jesus has taken on your shame and honors you by forgiving you and calling you His own.

But wait, Satan cries, what about the sins you have committed? Satan asks if you can really trust God? Here, in this way, Satan attacks your conscience. Always accusing you, bring up the past. But listen to and look at what God has done for you in your Baptism. Peter explains this by the inspiration of the Spirit: "**21** Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, **22** who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

Baptism saves you! The title of this message is How to Have a Good Conscience. God has given to you a good conscience in Baptism. No matter what dirt Satan throws at you, no matter the accusation that he hurls your way, it has been washed away in your Baptism. Baptism gives you a good conscience before God. Jesus your Savior and Great High Priest stands before

you and God. So, when Satan accuses you and reminds you of your sins, Jesus is there to forgive you. He reminds you that you are baptized. When you feel the guilt of what you have done wrong, Jesus reminds you that your sins have been forgiven, washed away by His blood. When you feel as if no one loves you, that no one cares, Jesus is there to remind He always loves you and always cares for you. Nothing separates you from His love.

In the Gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus entering the region of Tyre and Sidon. A mother who has a daughter who is demon possessed approaches Jesus asking for help and healing. Jesus' disciples beg Jesus to send her away, for her cries were embarrassing them. She continues to beg Jesus for mercy. Then, in a telling statement, Jesus says to her that "it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Why would Jesus say such a thing? Jesus is pointing out what the Jews believed at that time, they thought that the Gentiles were dogs, unfit for the kingdom of God. It would be beneath them to even associate with people who were not like them.

Can you imagine the shame that this woman felt? But Jesus didn't turn her away! She keeps pleading with Jesus and Jesus, seeing her faith, commends her saying: "Woman great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire. And her daughter was healed instantly." (Matthew 15: 21-28).

Helen Andrews was shamed, embarrassed in 2010 because her ex boyfriend verbally abused her during a program on C-Span. She was so affected by what happened, so embarrassed, shamed by another, that she could not move on from the incident. The moment dogged her. It clung to her. She changed her name, moved across the world to Australia to try to get away, but she couldn't. The reality was that there was nothing she could do to remove the shame. What Helen needed to hear was the reality of God's love. Jesus had forgiven her and He could give the power to forgive the one who shamed her. As human beings we need forgiveness like we need oxygen. We're fallen. We need to be loved. And God loves the sinner, for He sent Jesus to forgive us our sins and to make us His own, to live under Him in His kingdom.

Time and again we see people in the Scriptures who were shamed: Zaccheaus, the Samaritan woman, and others. To those who were shamed, Jesus welcomes them, forgives them, and honors them by calling them His own.

So when Satan speaks to you and tries to discourage you and shame you, take a page from Luther and tell the devil to go back to Hell where he belongs! You are baptized! Your sins are forgiven. You have a loving Savior who welcomes you with His loving arms. He will never leave nor forsake you.

And you can live joyfully, with a clean conscience, knowing that nothing will separate you from His love.

Amen