

SERMON SEPT. 1, 2024 “Redeemed”

Dear fellow redeemed of, by, and for Christ Jesus, in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus' words declare that like the pharisees in last week's lesson, we may look good on the outside, but on the inside, it aint a pretty picture.

Listen again to what He said: **“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”**

Or in other words, if we were cars, when you lift the hood on our heart, we're clunkers, lemons, a rusty AMC Gremlin, or one of those Ford Pintos with their optional exploding gas tanks.

Now, the world strongly disagrees with this assessment, asserting that, deep down inside we're basically good.

They say, look, the world is filled with people who work hard, take care of their families, contribute to society, donate their organs when they die, plant trees and lots of other *good* things.

And yes, most folks *do* look good on the outside, don't they? Just like we do. But as we saw last week, beware of outward, civic righteousness, for it covers up great evil.

Sin keeps being vomited up from our hearts; engine gunk clogs our minds—in shameful dreams, hateful thoughts, angry words, resentment, jealousy, judgment, and gossip.

And it doesn't take much for all this to explode like one of those Ford Pinto gas tanks.

So Remember: you don't have to look like a clunker to be a clunker, or run like a lemon to be a lemon, by nature we all deserve to be scrapped and sent to the junkyard.

This is why we sing in our liturgy: ***Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.***

Or, in other words, Lord, please don't scrap this old, sin-polluting clunker; don't trade me in!

Instead, as you did in the beginning, create something good out of nothing, for I know nothing is good in me. Give me a right spirit again. Wash me not only on the outside but on the inside.

Now, we have no right to pray such a prayer and no reason to believe that God should hear such a prayer from us sinful, polluting clunkers . . . except that this is the very thing He has - in His mercy and grace - promised to do.

For He has promised not to trade us in for better models but instead to send a Savior. A Savior to make clunkers into Christians; to take what is worthless and give you value again.

Not just a second chance but a transformation. For second chances don't really change anything; they just delay the inevitable - just as today's shiny new car is tomorrow's clunker.

Jesus has come so that what now pumps from your hearts is no longer sin and filth but love and life.

His love and life. Given to you.

Instead of trading you in for a newer, less clunky model, He traded His life for yours. He redeemed you **not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood** of infinite worth.

To do so, Jesus becomes even worse than a clunker on the cross. There he bore all your sin and shame, all your **evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness** upon Himself.

Since the wages of sin is death, Jesus died the death your sins had earned on a garbage heap called Calvary so that you, instead of being condemned, would, through His death and resurrection, become new.

And not just new for a time, but new forever.

In Holy Baptism, Jesus' cross becomes your cross; you are redeemed and made new.

In Baptism, the clunker in you receives its death, and you are raised and made new, transforming your 1973 Pinto into a Porsche 911, granting you a new heart and a new life.

In Baptism, Jesus creates in you a clean heart and gives you a right spirit - His Holy Spirit - to live in you. That you no longer be who you once were but now live a new, holy, Christ life.

And so, for baptized children of God, your sin and the opinions of the world no longer define who you are - your baptism does. For your baptism is your new birth to a new life.

A new life defined now by the Word of God, which declares that you are no longer a clunker but a Christian. In God's eyes, for Jesus' sake, you're no lemon, you're a Rolls Royce

Now, that doesn't mean you won't have your clunker moments—you will! Maybe a lot of them, certainly more than you would hope to have.

For your new heart and life is still tethered to your old, sinful flesh . . . until it too dies and is raised anew with Christ on the last day. Until then, you'll continue to sin.

That old, sinful flesh that caused Paul to cry out about the conflict within him - that he **doesn't do what he wants to do** and does do what **he doesn't want to do**! His old, sinful flesh still often got the better of even a great saint like Paul, as it does often for us.

That's why Paul in the Epistle today exhorts us to ***“put on the whole armor of God”***—the armor to guard and defend our hearts against the devil's schemes and attacks. It is the **armor of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, prayer, and the Word of God**—these protect us from evil.

For it is not other people in this world who are our enemies from whom we need protection—not really. As Pogo said, “We have met the enemy and it is us.”

And it's Satan who attacks Christians in public and in private, in good times and bad, in strength and in weakness, even attacking us, as Paul says, in the heavenly places, in the church.

Although not immune to Satan's attacks, we are safe in Christ. For to put on this armor is to put on Christ. And to put on Christ is to put on the One who is victorious over Satan. And if Jesus was victorious over Satan, we who are in Christ, are safe.

And so in repentance and faith and robed in His forgiveness, we are safe. His work for us is not a thing of the past, but an *ongoing* work.

Behold, Jesus makes all things new, changing the mortal into the immortal, the perishable into the imperishable, clunkers into Christians.

Jesus doesn't provide a mere tune-up to make you run better for a while, but the beginning of a life that will never end.

And so we gather here again after another week of sinning, our hearts spewing out vile things we wish they hadn't.

But though that is what you have done, that is not who you are. For you see, before you sin with your eyes, hands, or feet, you sin in heart, but before you sin in your heart, your Savior has forgiven you—It's all about grace.

And so we repent and receive Christ's forgiveness, and we come to His Altar and receive His body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

In this eating and drinking, we'd be robed again with His faith, love, and life that ***the holy things given into us would overcome that which naturally comes out of us.***

That we live not as lemons but as beloved children, **strong in the Lord and the strength of his might.**

And receiving such gifts, we then depart for another week in joy and peace, knowing that God's promises are good, His life is sure, and His forgiveness is certain.

So be who you are. For you are redeemed. You are new. You are Christ's. AMEN