

July 25, 2010  
Colossians 2:6-23  
Just Jesus?  
Erin Marshalek

Last week we talked about church songs, and how the Holy Spirit uses those songs to take root in our hearts and in our lives.

While we've been singing this morning, the voices of the church have made a beautiful sound. And that leads me to ask you a question:

How many of you feel 'interactive' this morning? (Strange question, I know.)

Alright, then I have four questions for you (and remember, these aren't rhetorical questions):

*What can wash away my sin?*  
(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)  
*What can make me whole again?*  
(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)  
*For my pardon, this I see...*  
(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)  
*For my cleansing, this my plea...*  
(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Where does a song like this come from? And I'm not talking about a particular writer or a given era: but where in the human heart does this song come from? And even though it's not in either of our hymnals here this morning, and it's not printed in the bulletin, why do you know it? Why has it gotten passed down? (Why is there a hush – or this gladness - after we sing it?)

The song resonates with us because it's born out of need:

When we do things that make us feel nasty...*what can wash away our sin?*  
When we've broken relationships, and trust...*what can make us whole again?*  
When we've taken more than we can repay...*for my pardon, this I see...*  
When we've damaged our relationship with God...*nothing can for sin atone...*  
And there's absolutely nothing we can do to make things better...*naught of good that I have done...*  
Then, we sing:  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*  
*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

We sing that song because we know our need. Deep down in our guts we feel that:  
We need a Savior...  
We've all sinned...  
Like Paul says in his letter to the Romans: “What I do I don't want to do, and what I hate I do.”

And the church in Colosse knew that same need. They needed release from sin, and guilt, and that old way of doing all the wrong things. And they knew it.

In Paul's day, Christians distinguished between the 'old self' which was who they were before Christ, which is who they became once they came to faith in him.

And the struggle in this church was with the old self.

In this letter, Paul acknowledges how much of an issue this was:

Verse 11: "your sinful nature"

Verse 13: "When you were dead in your sinful nature"  
needing "forgiveness of sins"

Verse 14: "the written code that was against us"

Verse 23: "restraining sensual indulgence"

The Colossian church had a sin problem (who doesn't?).

But like some churches, and unlike others, *they knew it*.

Not only did they know it, but they felt it deep down within them.

They didn't just feel it during their confession times, when they could bring it to God, ask for forgiveness, leave it there, and walk away.

It nagged them.

They never felt new: they always felt old.

They never felt released: they always felt trapped.

They never felt clean: they always felt dirty.

They never felt forgiven, even when they were forgiven: they always felt guilty.

And like we've talking about the past couple weeks, the false teachers who came into the church did not make things better. They taught: "If you have a problem with breaking the law – if you're always guilty of doing the wrong things ...if you keep being bad people– then we have the obvious solution: You've got to become better."

"Becoming better" meant following all sorts of extra rituals and rules. In a lot of ways, it amounted to the church beating themselves up.

Even though most of the church wasn't Jewish (and so wasn't required for their faith), these false teachers said: "The only way to be properly initiated into the community of faith is to be circumcised."

They pressured the church to keep all sorts holy days:

(Verse 16) Not only the Sabbath (which, then, was a very strict day of rest), but also religious festivals, and New Moon feasts.

And as far as worship goes (verse 18), they said, "It's not enough to gather and sing your simple songs and pray your simple prayers. You need the angels to help you worship, so you can worship like them. You need visions and these super-spiritual experiences."

(Verse 16): These teachers also gave the church a hard time about what they ate and drank. They said, "If you're really sorry for who you are, then don't even think about eating a juicy piece of lamb or your favorite cake. It makes you seem like you're not sorry enough. Don't handle it! Don't taste it! Don't even touch it!"

And (verse 23), these teachers even pressured the church to treat their bodies harshly. “Don't sleep; pray. Pray more.” – “Don't eat more than the bare minimum.” – “Beat your bodies into submission and *show* how sorry you are. *Demonstrate* how much you want to be changed.”

So, that's what the church did. They listened to their “teachers” and figured, “We've got to do more and more and more to make ourselves right with God.

We've got to take this old self by the arms and restrain it.

We've got to take this old self by the neck and kill it.”

(By force, you know?)

*What can wash away my sin?* Well, maybe it's better to let it thirst to death.

*What can make me whole again?* Maybe it means living a very controlled life.

*This is all my hope and peace...* Worshipping *hard*.

*This is all my righteousness...* Working at it, constantly, without resting, until I can somehow make myself better.

Do you know what that's like?

I grew up a generation or two too late, but I've heard stories of what it used to be like in the Christian Reformed Church (and other American church traditions) a number of years back. I was sitting with a group of some of you this past Wednesday, and you were telling me how you couldn't:

play dice,

or cards (unless it was Rook!),

or go to the movies,

or dance,

or even cut up paper dolls on Sundays.

It was feeding that old, sinful self..

...and what would happen if Jesus came back and he caught you dancing, or in the theater?

The culture in our church has changed quite a bit along the way. But are there ways in which we, too, seek more than 'just Jesus' to make ourselves better?

We're all agreed that there's something in us that's not okay, right? But the issue is: what do you do with it?

Are there things you have to fix before God can love you?

Are there ways you punish yourself?

Are there memories of guilt that you cannot get rid of, even though you've asked for forgiveness over and over and over...?

Do you need *Jesus and* something else to be okay with God?

For God to be okay with you?

That even *with* Jesus, you're not good enough?

It's that same burden of not feeling good enough – or not *doing* enough, or not *having* enough – that moved the Colossian church to be so hard on itself.

And Epaphras, their pastor told Paul that the church was living with *Jesus and* all these other things in

order to be good enough.

So, Paul begins the letter by telling the church, “The Gospel at work all over the world is at work in you, too, Colosse.”

Then Paul paints this big, cosmic picture of their Lord in these big strokes: “He is the image of the invisible God...the firstborn of all creation...in him all things hold together...through his blood shed on the cross, he has reconciled *everything* to himself.” This is the Jesus to whom you belong, Paul says.

And then he says: “*In Christ* all the fullness of the Godhead lives in bodily form...and you have been given fullness in Christ.” Everything that is the Father's is also given to Christ. And everything that is Christ's he's given to us.

Paul goes on, and continues to paint in bold strokes – not just about Christ now, but also about *them*:

“In him you were circumcised. And it wasn't the type of circumcision where you just just cut away a little skin, like these teachers are telling you to do. He's not interested in what you do on the outside. Christ is able to cut you to the heart...and he does.”

People can't cut away what he cuts away.  
You can't make yourself new like he makes you new.  
Doing things doesn't change you like he changes you.  
Nothing can wash away your sin or make you whole again...but Jesus.  
    Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

That's why Paul says, “Don't let anyone judge you by what you do or don't do. The only thing that matters is Jesus. And you already have fullness in him.

    When you were baptized, he washed away your sin.  
    His blood *has* made you whole again.”

Can you imagine what this must have been like to hear?

The Colossian church had been living with:

    Jesus *and* angels  
    Jesus *and* special rituals  
    Jesus *and* rules, and guilt, and shame.

And Paul says, “No more *Jesus-and*. *Just Jesus*.”

With Christ, they shared in all the fullness of God. This is the beautiful mystery: in baptism, Christ joined his life to theirs. In the baptismal waters, his blood made them clean.

“That's the reality,” Paul says. “That's *you*.” No matter how you feel. No matter what you've done wrong, or what you could ever do to make up for it. It's *nothing but the blood of Jesus*.

Brothers and sisters, that's our reality, too.

If we've been baptized into name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, something of our very identity has changed. It's not that that baptism itself did it, but somewhere amidst the water and the words, God himself baptized us: not just with water to wash us on the outside, but by his blood, to

wash clean even the deepest, darkest, worst parts of us.

As baptized believers, we *have* been marked by the blood of Jesus.

We live in an age where we still struggle with sin, but sin doesn't define us.

God doesn't ask us to punish ourselves or fix ourselves; he just calls us to confess, and say, "I'm sorry."

And he forgives us.

God frees us from the rules the world imposes on us; and he gives us his grace.

We don't need anything else. All we need is Jesus. Just Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, some of you have come in this morning feeling low. Maybe you've brought your shame or guilt or fear that's come from something you said, or did, or thought this past week. Maybe you've lived with the nagging fear that you're not good enough. This morning, God speaks the good news to *you*:

God has given *you* fullness in Christ.

God disarms the powers and authorities that stand against you.

He shames the shamers, triumphing over them by the cross.

In Christ, God judges in *your* favor.

Through Jesus – *just Jesus* – you have enough.

God has given you (you!) all fullness in Christ.

He puts an end to fear. He puts an end to deal-making. He lays all our shame and fear to rest.

What does this look like? How do we rest in *just Jesus*?

It means going back to the simple truths we believe.

It means simple, honest prayer.

For me, when I struggle with this, I go back to an old song – an African-American spiritual – and I make it my prayer. It can be as simple as:

In the morning when I rise (and the guilt of the day before is still hanging on)...

...*give me Jesus.*

When dark midnight is my cry...

...*give me Jesus.*

Even when I come to die, and I wonder what judgment I deserve...

...*give me Jesus.*

*Oh, you can have all this world, but give me Jesus.*

So then, people of God, put your trust in Jesus.

The one who is flesh and blood and Son of God.

The one who really died, and really rose to life again.

The one who is Savior like no one else is Savior.

The one who is Lord like no one else is Lord.

So then, people of God:

*What can wash away our sin?*

(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)

*What can make us whole again?*

(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)

*Nothing can for sin atone...*

(Nothing but the blood of Jesus)

*Nothing that our hands have done...*

(Nothing but the blood of Jesus.)

*Nothing* but the blood of Jesus.

Amen?

Thanks be to God!