

**“Washings”  
Hebrew 6:1 -2;**

So this morning that is our passage again which highlights the primary or elementary teaching of the Christian faith.

**“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”**

Okay so that’s our passage this morning.

To kick things off, is there anything that stands out grammatically?

Did you pick it?

**“Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.”**

It doesn’t say ‘instructions about baptism’ but ‘baptisms’.  
And the when you do the research that word is not the usual word for baptism.  
A better translation is ‘washings’.

So what are these washings?

We think in terms of physical hygiene but if you were a Jewish person in the time of Jesus and Paul and the early believers, your mind would go to all sorts of ritual washing that needed to take place.

Priests for example, were required to wash their hands and feet before service in the Temple:

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a bronze basin, with its bronze stand, for washing. Place it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with

water from it. Whenever they enter the tent of meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die.”

Exodus 30:17 - 21

By the time of Jesus devout Jews had all kinds of washing practices - hands, cup and pots and pans.<sup>1</sup>

It was all related to being acceptable to God.

But when Jesus came he said that these had their place but they're not enough. The ceremonial and ritual washings need to go deeper to what is more important. What is more important is what is going on, on the inside.

He said, for example, to this group of highly devout people called the Pharisees, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.” (Matthew 23:25).

Of course we don't follow these today in the majority of our churches. The washing regulations are like a dim outline of the reality that was to come.

So the washings spoken about here are what God wants to do within.

And you know we do have people in our community and in our churches who are so aware of stuff that still sits there on the inside.

I mean, there are people who have done things and seen things and taken part in things for which they are ashamed.

There are people that have had things done *to them* that shouldn't have been done to anyone.

There are also people who have *done* things to other people that shouldn't have been done to anyone.

You look at some of the statistics... they're not good.

And it sits there for some people, sometimes for years and even decades.

So there's muck and there's mess and dung and there's dirt *on the inside*.

My question then, is

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 7:3 - 4.

***“What do most people do with their “dirt”?”***

Tell the person next to you.

I don't know about you but sometimes I go for walks around this beautiful town of Katikati. We did it especially over lock down.  
You have a number of people who also walk their dogs.  
And now and then they forget to clean up after their K9's.

So what happens - and I don't know if this has ever happened you - but you get back home and a smell begins to waft.  
So you sniff the air and then you look at your shoe and you realise that you've stepped in some dog doo-doo... *and it is the worst!!!*  
So you try and wipe it off on the grass and you get a stick and try and scrap it off.  
But in the end you know you have to get out the scrubbing brush.

So people are the same with stuff - they try desperately to clean it.  
Sometime by opening up to others.  
Sometimes with counsellors.  
And that can bring a measure of relief.

But often those attempts fail.

Then, when that doesn't work, they bury it.

And they bury their stuff under so many things; so many *ordinary* things.

Some people try to bury it under their work. They give themselves to long hours and long weeks thinking this will make the dirt go away.

Some people self-medicate. Alcohol or legal and illicit drugs.

Some people do it through compulsive spending.

Some people push it down inside themselves by the sheer force of their will.  
But then when they lie awake at night the memories come flooding back and the sense of shame and defilement overtakes them yet again.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Paul speaks to a bunch of believers who had been into all kinds of awful behaviour. Some were into all kinds of sexual sin - they sexually permissive, sleeping with anyone or anybody; some were habitual

binge drinkers; drinking to excess. There were those who were greedy, never content; enough was never enough. Others were verbally abusive, their words were like weapons. Then there were others who were thieves.<sup>2</sup>

But Paul goes on to say, that's what you *were*.

Now through what Jesus has done, you have been forgiven and set apart for God's service and you are now in right relationship with God and *you have been washed* - made clean, cleansed.

The stains of the past, the dirt and crud are washed away - they no longer define you.

Our God can make people clean.

My next question is this:

***"So how does God wash us?"***

Again tell the person next to you.

For one, we do have to know that God does want to make us clean.

I don't know about you but have you ever heard the saying, "God can't stand to be in the presence of sin."

So there is a perception out there - a wrong perception - that God is large and bald and dressed in white - with bulging muscles and a tough guy earring. He wears latex gloves and goes around with a bottle of bleach and a bottle of disinfectant wiping down the walls and benches of heaven just to keep everything spick and span.

There is this image of God who is Mr Clean, neat, tidy and pristine.

Not only do we end up with this distorted vision of a God who runs away in horror at the sight of our mess and muck to protect his own purity.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

When God saw our mess and muck....He ran toward us.

We see this most graphically in the Cross.

We're told that Jesus although He knew what awaited Him, set His face like flint towards Jerusalem.

You see, on the Cross a person hung in agony, half dead and half alive, for days.

They would be covered in blood and flies.

They would be nibbled at by rats and pecked at by crows.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 11.

Despite what you see in the great artworks, they would completely naked but unable to cover yourself.

And the whole point of the Cross was to shame and humiliate and keep a person alive as long as possible.

Jesus chose this.

He was literally a bloody mess as He hung on the Cross.

Jesus embraced the dirt for our sake.

If that's God's intent, which it is, what's the means that God uses?

How does He bring this about in our lives?

When you read through Scripture there are three ways in particular come to the surface.

What the Old Testament points to becomes clear in the New.

One way is through *His Word*.

We're told in Ephesians that Messiah, Jesus, made His Church, His people clean through "the washing with water through the word..."<sup>3</sup>

You have to say, how does that work?

Well for one, Scripture can highlight the areas that need cleansing.

It can show up the dirt.

Again not to shame us but to point us to the God who does offer cleansing.

And it's in Scripture too that we hear God's promises to wash us.

We can take 1 John 1:9 as our own:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and *purify* [cleanse] us from all unrighteousness."

What it means is the voices from the past are no longer the loudest.

Then in tandem with His Word is *His Holy Spirit*.

Titus chapter 3 verse 5:

"He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour"

We need the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 5:26

The Spirit takes what Jesus has done and makes it real in our lives.

You see, Jesus took our dirt and made us clean; Jesus took our filth and gave us his purity.

And what the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of holiness does, is He comes into our inner world and makes Himself a home.

Then takes what Jesus has accomplished for us and begins to wash away the muck.

The stuff that keeps you awake at night he begins to cleanse.

We become new people and have new beginnings.

We are made clean on the inside.

Our shame is taken by Jesus and we walk in a new dignity given by the Holy Spirit.

Then you have *water baptism*.

There is a link made in Scripture between water baptism and being washed.

Water baptism is not just another ritual.

Baptism is a very physical thing. You get wet.

You are touched, you move, you experience.

It is incredibly tactile. It's not just words, it is something you do and is done to you.

It is an event.

Something significant and definitive happens in our lives.

God blesses for one.

It is an outward symbol of an inward reality; we are washed outside and in.

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You might be thinking, "Reece, I've walked with the Lord for years but I the dirt still seems to linger."

Sometimes it's a matter of asking, of confession, of admitting to the Lord it's there.

But there are times when what you may need is a confidante - who will pray with you so that which God has already done for you will become a reality in your life. I had those people in my life.

And we it's comes to our stuff, and talking about our stuff, we want to do it safely, confidentially, carefully and wisely

So to finish, a story I've told before.

A man tells a true story of a plane trip to Colorado Springs. As he was waiting to board the plane there was a little girl about five years old and she was just as cute as could be. She had pretty leather shoes, she had a fluffy dress, she had ribbons and bows in her hair, and she was jumping up and down. There was no escaping this noisy and happy girl who was clapping her hands and saying, "I'm gonna see Daddy, I'm gonna see Daddy." The man was thankful to be boarding the plane, because after ten minutes, what we cute became obnoxious and irritating.

However, when he found his seat who happened to be sitting right across from him? The cute and irritating little girl. And all the way to Colorado Springs, the man had to listen to her going, "I'm gonna see Daddy, I'm gonna see Daddy."

Being a short flight they only thing they gave out was cookies and Coca-Cola. Every time the flight attendant came down the aisle, this little girl would take a cookie and a Coca-Cola. He had never seen a little girl eat so many cookies and drink so much Coca-Cola in just a half hour.

As the plane approached the airport in Colorado Springs, there was a thunderstorm. If you have been in an airplane in a thunderstorm, you know what happened. The airplane began to bounce up and down, shift and shake and shudder.

Everyone was tens but as the little girl bounced up and down after drinking all those colas and eating all those cookies something happened...

There was an... eruption.

Now Coca-Cola does not smell bad. Cookies do not smell bad. Therefore, you would think if you put cookies and Coca-Cola in a sweet little girl with ribbons and bows and patent leather shoes, what would come out would not smell bad. The man said this was the stinkiest vomit had ever smelled in his life! And it just kept coming!

Just when he thought it was over she would heave again. And every time she heaved and he smelt that stink, he felt like heaving too.

He was so glad when the plane landed and pulled up to the gate. He was the first one out of his seat, down the aisle, and off the plane. And as he rushed up the ramp to get into the terminal he saw this man in a gray flannel suit coming down the ramp eagerly looking for someone, and he instinctively knew who he was.

And so he lingered. He wanted to see the great encounter, the great meeting, between Daddy and “Vomit-face.”

What happened next was incredible.

The man brushed by, yelled at his wife, “You go get the luggage; I want to hug my little girl!”

And when he saw this little girl, covered with vomit, smelling BAD, he swept up in his arms and hugged her and kissed her as though there wasn’t a thing wrong in the world.<sup>4</sup>

You know, whatever dirt or muck or mess there is in our lives, God runs towards us.

And just as the father in that story would have cleaned up his child He can make you clean.

He can make you clean.

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<sup>4</sup> Tony Campolo, *Stories That Feed Your Soul* (Ventura, Ca: Regal , 2010 ), 30 – 31.