LD 26; Zechariah 12:10-13:1; I Peter 3:18-22; Baptism as a Sacrament I. The Recipients of Baptism II. The Instrument of Washing III. The Consequence of this Cleansing

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how often do you wash? 50 percent of people in North America take a shower once a day, but hopefully they wash their hands more than that. The average American uses around 50 gallons of water a day which includes the dishwasher and wash machine. So then, what kind of dishes go in the dishwasher? Well, dirty ones. What kind of clothes go into the washing machine? Hopefully you are not washing your clean clothes! But the abundance and ease of water usage today was not always the case. In Judea in the days of Jesus, washing with water was a blessing! It was also needed! Most white-collar jobs today do not get you very dirty. But just walking around in the middle east would get you dirty back then. From dirt and dust on the roads- to animal droppings on every path. Your feet were always dirty. And without running water in the homes, washing was much more than just a ritual! No one took showers in their homes- if you wanted to be clean you had to go down to the river. It is in this context that we consider the sacrament of baptism today. As we saw last week, sacraments are signs and seals given to the church by Jesus Christ. Their use is that of teaching and encouraging. So today our theme is: Jesus Christ gives the washing of baptism as a sign and seal of His cleansing work.

**I. The Recipients of Baptism**

In our first point, we consider the recipients of baptism. So then, who should be baptized? To ask this question another way- who is it that needs to be washed? Well, the fact is that everyone needs to be washed. There is no one who is exempt from this necessary cleansing! As you will remember, the need for washing is a reminder of our need for cleansing in a spiritual sense. Why is it that everyone needs to be washed? Because everyone is dirty in their sins- guilty in their transgressions. Paul makes this clear in Rom. 3- no one is righteous. No one understands. And again- all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God! Even the best of humanity falls into this category- dirty and in need of cleansing. As we saw a few weeks ago in Zechariah 3- even the high priest Joshua was wearing dirty robes. Even he was covered in filth. Added to this; even the best that we do- the most righteous work that man can perform- is as filthy rags. Isaiah 64 clarifies that we have all become unclean- all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. Now in our home, we have a system of sorts to help keep things dirty and clean separate. Folded cloths are clean- cloths in a pile in front of the washer are dirty. Well if you were to sort and separate humanity between the dirty and the clean, you would have to place all of humanity into the dirty pile! None of us are folded- we all need to be washed! We all stink- we smell like smoke! We are dirty- covered in mud. So the first part of the answer is clear- we are all dirty and we stand in need- everyone needs to be baptized. No human is exempt. So our LD 26 starts off with this assumption- we are dirty- and need to be cleansed! But the problem is this- no amount of water can give us the cleansing that is necessary. Yes, we have filth that needs to be taken away, but water cannot do what is necessary. There are some things that are worse than dirt- some stains that are worse than grass stains. Which is worse- a little mud on your hands or a germ that invades your body. Some germs cannot be killed with Lysol! 99.9% effective means that some can still survive! But the germs that Lysol and Bleach can kill are nothing compared to the inner sickness that remains! If the dirt and pollution that is seen is only a picture of a hidden, inner, spiritual sickness- what then can reach the heart of man from where this pollution springs forth? More about this solution in our second point. But before we move on to consider the instrument of our washing, it must also be said that Baptism is not for everyone! Although it is true that everyone needs this washing- we do not go around splashing water on everyone we see! No, baptism is a sign and seal given to the community of faith. It is a mark reserved for those whom God has brough near. As QA 74 clarifies, baptism is for God’s covenant people. Those who belong to the family of God- those who have been grafted into this line- those planted into the greenhouse of God’s grace. So believers and their children are the ones that are to receive this sign. Similar to the sign of circumcision that we saw last week, baptism is a mark that God uses to set His people apart from the world. So those who are baptized are indeed sinners- but the recipients of baptism are also those whom God has been pleased to draw near and enfold in His covenantal arms.

**II. The Instrument of Washing**

Now that we have considered the recipients of baptism, in our second point we consider the instrument of this washing. As I said before, there is no amount of water that can remove the filth of our sin! No Lysol wipes can wipe away the stain of guilt- no pressure washer of man can blast away our iniquity or peal back our transgressions. In other words, the washing that takes place at baptism is not designed to remain external. Physical hygiene is not our main concern at baptism! You have water at home which can clean your body. That is not why we baptize in the church! Remember that the pollution of man comes from a heart that is fallen- from a rebellious nature that goes astray and does what is right in its own eyes! So we need a cleansing agent that can get to the heart of man and that can deal with sin at the source. This is the very thing promised in our reading from Zechariah 12. They will look on the one that they have pierced. A spear will be pushed into the side of the promised one. And from this wound, as chapter 13 continues, a fountain will be opened for the house of David. A fountain of blood and water will flow forth! And this “fountain will cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.” Zechariah was prophesying of a time when the Lamb of God would take away the sins of the world- and the way in which He would do this would be by His death. It is the laying down of one’s life that proves this love! It is the shedding of His blood for another that secures our life. Specifically, as QA 72 puts it, only Jesus Christ blood and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sins. So Jesus’ blood and the Holy Spirit are the agents of this cleansings. Baptism is a double washing then. Water as a sign points to this blood and the Spirit. It would be Jesus who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. So when we think of the washing of baptism, the water points to and reminds us of Jesus blood. The death of Jesus on the cross and the pouring out of His blood is what secures our forgiveness. The wrath of God is turned away as another dies in our place- as another suffers the consequence of our rebellion- as another becomes a curse as required for sin. Rev. 1:5 says that He has freed us from our sins by His blood. So blood becomes the cleansing agent that we all need- making us clean in the sight of God! QA 70- forgiveness is secured because of Christ’s blood poured out for us in His sacrifice on the cross. But also the Spirit! The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God- the Spirit of power and life. The Spirit being poured out upon us now secures the following cleansing and renewal which we need. Not only dealing with the forgiveness of sins but also being raised up to live a new life! The Spirit enables us- gives us the will and the way by which we might live as the holy people of God! As I Peter 1:2 says, we are elect in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood. So the Spirit is also active in our baptism. Not only marking us but renewing us into the image of Christ. Cleansed to live a new life- saying no to sin and yes to obedience because we are now a clean and holy people.

**III. The Consequence of this Cleansing**

So the cleansing agents in baptism are these- the blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But what does the blood of Jesus and the Holy Spirit accomplish? In our final point, we consider the consequence of this cleansing. The first consequence is external. Those who receive the sign externally are marked by God. These are set apart- as they are signified as one to whom God extends His covenantal kindness. Baptism is how members of the church are marked- how they are made known. Baptism is a sign of our entrance into the church. This one is a member of the covenant community. Just as all the players on the same team wear the same jerseys- so those who are members of church wear the mark of baptism.

The second consequence is internal- as it reaches to the heart and soul of man. Because of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice- because of the efficacy of His blood- we receive the complete forgiveness of all our sins. Those who are truly baptized into Christ by faith receive the promised blessing! This again is why baptism is given to us as a means of grace! Baptism is a seal as QA 69 puts it- we are promised that Jesus blood and Spirit will surely wash away all my sins. Baptism is a promise of this fact! There is no stain that Jesus blood cannot remove- no pollution that He cannot cleanse- no debt that He cannot pardon and forgive! Jesus blood is no less potent or powerful than water! So what is signified by way of this picture- what is promised by way of this seal- will come to be! Do not doubt that Jesus can and will do as He has said! As we read in I Peter 3:21- “baptism now saves you. Not the removal of dirt from you body by way of water, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ!”

But there is also a third consequence- and that is how we are viewed by God. When we have been washed by the blood of Jesus- when the Spirit is dwelling within us- we can be assured that we have been justified! That God views us as His own! To be clear- we are talking about the actual work secured by the blood and Spirit- not that which is accomplished by the external water alone. In other words- it is possible to receive the external sign of baptism and never receive the internal work. We might call these covenant breakers- those who reject God and turn their back on the promises that God has made to them. To be clear- not all Israel is of Israel! Not everyone who is externally in the church is elect and has faith! Not all who are baptized with water are baptized with Jesus blood! But for those who do believe- who receive the sign and the internal reality of the sign- to these God would have you know- you are forgiven, accepted and redeemed! So the spiritual reality is clear and certain- that Jesus blood and the Holy Spirit saves us! True baptism them is not performed only by the hand of a pastor- but rather baptism is the work of God by which your sins are washed away! But before we close, we remember that the Catechism is very personal and specific. Baptism it to teach, signify, seal and comfort you personally. Have you been baptized? How does your baptism remind you- assure you benefit you personally? In other words- we are all personally called to benefit from the baptism we have each received. When you were baptized- your name was used! You received a personal promise! The name of the Triune God was pronounced upon you! Water was sprinkled on your head! You may not remember this event- but you were there! So at your baptism the Father said- I am your God and you are my child! The Son said- I am your Good Shepherd- by my shed blood you are forgiven! The Spirit said- I am the Holy One and you are a holy person! Set apart for sacred service! As Ananias says in Acts 22- arise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on Jesus’ name. So may we all be washed as we remember and believe! As our theme states: Jesus Christ gives the washing of baptism as a sign and seal of His cleansing work. Though your sins are red like scarlet, you shall be as white as snow!