

James 1:17–22 (23–25), 26–27

May 10, 2020

“The Christian Sponge”

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

[*Introduction*] Picture the Christian church ...  
Picture the Christian church as James would like to see it.  
Every Christian would... act like a Christian,  
sound like a Christian, and  
think like a Christian.

That would be perfect.

After all, isn't that what our Lord commands of us?

In Matthew 5:48 it says,

***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”***

Then, whenever the world would look upon a Christian, it would see Christ.

In our actions and in our words toward others,

we would be an accurate reflection of Jesus Christ!

The world would look at us and see our Lord.

Luther writes, ***“Man was created to be the image of God,  
and to be His image for this very purpose:***

***that God should and would be known through him.***

***Therefore God should appear and shine***

***in the entire life and conduct of man***

***as in a mirror;***

***and a Christian should have no higher and greater concern  
than so to live as not to dishonor God's name.”***

(E. Plass, *What Luther Says*, #624)

But this isn't the case.

This isn't our reality.

We Christians are —to say the least— improper reflections of Christ.

At times our actions may even project a negative image of Christ.

We need look no further than our own daily lives.

Paul says, ***“I do not understand what I do.***

***For what I want to do — I do not do,***

***but what I hate — I do”*** (Rom 7:15).

This is the reality of our daily struggle with evil.

Mark Twain is known for funny sayings like:

*“Clothes make the man.*

*Naked people have little or no influence on society.”*

But he also wisely said this:

*“Most people are bothered by those passages in Scripture that they cannot understand.*

*The Scripture which troubles me most is the Scripture I do understand”*

Our text is painfully clear.

We are not the ideal Christian

nor are we the ideal Christian church

that James—or God—would like us to be.

[*Sponges*]

Have you thought much about sponges?

There are synthetic sponges and natural sponges.

Most of what you will see in the grocery store is synthetic,

but natural sponges are still harvested around the world.

At one time, Tarpon Springs, Florida, was a large producer of natural sponges.

In years past, the Sponge Docks were major centers for the local economy

because of the abundance of natural sea sponges that grow in the area.

The sponge divers would go down under the water for great lengths of time  
as they walked along the sea floor, collecting natural sea sponges.

They would face the perils of sharks and other sea predators.

And diving equipment, well back then it was not what it is today.

In those days, diving equipment was heavy and cumbersome,

with large brass helmets with glass portals to see.

The diver's connection to the surface

was a single airline which extended from their large brass helmets to the surface.

With an single airline,

the sponge boat would supply pumped air into the line

and keep an eye out for a tug on the rope.

If the diver got into trouble

or when he was finished harvesting sea sponges,

he would pull the rope

and then the crew would hoist him to the surface.

[*You are a Sponge*]

And you know, this got me thinking.

The diver entered into a strange world... to harvest.

Christ did the same for us.

He entered into a strange world  
to harvest — you and me.

In this analogy we are the sponge.

I mean we say it all the time, right?  
Especially about little kids, they're like little sponges  
soaking up whatever we do or say.

So picture Yourself as a Sponge

Squeeze a dry sponge and nothing comes out.  
It cannot yield what it does not have.  
But squeeze a wet sponge and watch the it flow!

Now suppose you have a sponge and a pitcher of Coke Zero.

If you dip your sponge in the Coke Zero pitcher  
and then you lift it out and squeeze it,  
what's going to come out?  
7-Up?  
No, when you squeeze a sponge soaked in Coke Zero,  
Coke Zero is going to come out.

Think about it...

If you saturate your mind  
with questionable music, videos, magazines etc.  
do you think that holiness, happiness and godliness will flow out?

Surround yourself with that which is God pleasing.

Read His Word.  
Attend church services and Bible studies.  
Avoid anything questionable and know...  
KNOW THIS  
that in Holy Baptism you and I have been immersed in the water of life.  
Through the Gospel  
we participate in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (Rom 6).  
Christ is Risen. ***He is Risen, Indeed! Alleluia!***

We have been reborn through the blood of the Lamb  
and we are now saturated with the righteousness of God.

***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.  
The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and  
gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).***

And know this...

As the pressures of the world squeeze those drenched in the righteousness of God,  
they cannot help but flow with his love and forgiveness,  
they cannot help but to show hospitality.

**[Church as Sponge]**

Now, picture the Christian Church as a Sponge

We as a corporate church are a sponge in need of forgiveness.

We have failed and fallen short of what the Lord would have us do.

Thanks be to God for the forgiveness

earned for us on the cross of Calvary.

In the Nicene Creed our whole congregation confesses

with all other Christian congregations throughout church history

that we “acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.”

The church as a whole has received the washing of water  
with the word (Eph 5:26).

Rejoice in the squeeze (Phil 4:4)!

Be thankful for the times when we are put under pressure  
to bring glory to our Lord and Savior.

Stress is no fun and no one likes being in a high pressure crisis situation,

No one likes this COVID-19 environment,

to be shut down or to be open,

no one likes it

yet this is often the best time for the living water of God’s grace  
to flow out from us and nourish the lives of others.

If we as individuals and as a church

are saturated with the Good News of God’s love and forgiveness for Jesus’ sake,  
we will have a completely different attitude when we are put under pressure.

We can rejoice and be thankful,

since being **squeezed** gives us the chance

to bring honor and glory to our Lord Jesus.

Be a sponge! Be a sponge that soaks up God’s Word.

Then you’ll be ready when the world puts the squeeze on you. Amen!

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As followers of Christ, “Keep loving one another earnestly

And show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” AMEN! (1 Pt 4:8-9)

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