"Two Robes" -- John 19:1-7

March 28, 2000 -- 3 Lent
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

1 My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?
Why are You so far from helping Me, And from the words of My groaning?
2 O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear;
And in the night season, and am not silent.
3 But You are holy,
Enthroned in the praises of Israel.
4 Our fathers trusted in You;
They trusted, and You delivered them.
5 They cried to You, and were delivered;
They trusted in You, and were not ashamed.
6 But I am a worm, and no man;
A reproach of men, and despised by the people. (Psalm 22)

But I am a worm, and no man, wrote the psalmist, as he prophetically described the crucifixion of our Lord. A worm, not a man. A look at the Hebrew makes clear that this was even an insignificant worm (t[;l;AT) as worms go. It was a little grub. However, it was one sought out: Men earnestly searched for this kind of a worm; when they found it, they took care to smash and grind it. Why? Because, once crushed, the worm's blood became a dye used to color garments a beautiful purple or scarlet color, and such garments sold for a high price. It was the clothing of kings, the splendor of rulers. So went the unfortunate life of this insignificant grub, a worm that was made to be crushed for the benefit of man.

It is no surprise then, that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords would wear a fine robe of scarlet-purple. However, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords wore the robe not to show His majesty, but because He was the worm who would be crushed for the benefit of all.

I. The Robe of Suffering

Jesus wears two different robes during His Passion for us. Herod dresses Him up in a robe of bright white, mocking Him as the Son of God and great King. Herod's blind foolishness is offensive to the people of God, but even a blind hog finds acorns from time to time. Jesus is indeed the Son of God and truly the King of kings; although Herod does not believe it, He does indeed deserve to wear such a robe of white.

For Herod, it is nothing more than a diversion as he makes Jesus his jester for an hour. However, dear Christians, do not be blind like that foolish, wicked king; learn from the robe. The Lord Jesus wears that robe of whitest white before Herod as a testimony to you, a declaration that according to His Person, He is pure and holy, completely without sin. He is not on trial for sins He has committed, He is going to the cross to die for your iniquity. The white robe of Jesus declares to us His purity and holiness, the stark truth that He does not die for Himself. However, Jesus is donning

the sins of the world. Therefore, He does not keep the pure white robe on His shoulders. He exchanges it for the robe of sin and suffering.

Thus we read in our Gospel lesson today that as Jesus is beaten so terribly by Pilate's Roman soldiers, he is cloaked in a robe of scarlet or purple. As with Herod, the soldiers are blind to the truth as they array their Victim in this raiment; remember, purple is the robe of a king, and the task of the soldiers is to mock Jesus as a king. Therefore, they clothe the Lord's scourged shoulders in a purple robe even as they work to beat Him nearly to death.

He looks like no powerful ruler, but mark what happens here. The King of kings and Lord of lords is suffering to redeem His people. The outside of the purple robe is colored by the blood of a worm that is crushed; the inside of the robe is now stained with the blood of the Son of God-now a worm and no man, as He sheds His blood for the sin of the world.

Dear hearers, He sheds His blood for you, that you might be purified. Do not turn your ears from the news of your sin, but mortify your sinful nature with the proclamation of God's Law. In Isaiah 1:18, your sins are described as the color of scarlet, the color of crimson-just like that robe. In Isaiah 64:6, the Lord declares that all our righteousnesses are like filthy, bloody rags. In Psalm 51, as David mourns his sin, he prays that he might be delivered from the bloodguilt that he has (Ps. 51:14).

Where the white robe taught us of Jesus' purity, the purple robe teaches us of our sin. It declares to us that Christ puts on our iniquities, our bloodguilt, and suffers for it in our stead.

But take heart! As the blood of the Lord overcomes the wormstain of that purple robe, even so it overcomes your sin. Yes, your sin is scarlet, but Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Is. 1:18).

The Lord does not wear this purple robe of suffering so that He can judge you all the more for your transgressions. The Lord wears this purple robe of suffering so that He can make your death His death, so that He can die in your place and take the punishment for your sin. This He has done: The King has died for His people.

Furthermore, now that the Lord has made your death His death and died it for you, He now makes His death your death through the waters of Holy Baptism. St. Paul declares in Romans 6, Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. In your Baptism, then, you have been united with the Lord in His death on the cross. It is there that He has shared the benefits of His suffering with you, forgiving you for all of your sins. It is in the waters of Holy Baptism, accompanied by the Word of God, that you have worn the robe of suffering and have died to sin. And it is there, at the font, that the robe of sin and suffering is removed from you and exchanged for one of purity and righteousness-For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal 3:27).

Stop then, and reflect upon the battered Savior in the purple robe. Pilate has Him beaten so that He will not agonize so long upon the cross. But Jesus doesn't suffer merely as an accident before His crucifixion; He suffers and dies so that you need not suffer and die for your sin, facing an eternity of hellish death.

Is that it, then? Do we rejoice this night because we have been rescued from such suffering and death for our iniquity? Is the Good News this night only that we are no longer slaves to sin? This is Good News indeed, but there is more. Those who are rescued from something are rescued to something else. Those who are no longer slaves are now free-but free for what? Free for eternal life and the robe of righteousness.

II. The Robe of Righteousness

Rejoice this night, dear people of God. The Lord Jesus has died your death so that He might give to you His life. He has taken your sin from you so that He might clothe you in His righteousness, innocence and blessedness forever.

Rejoice in the news of the epistle for this night, from Revelation 19: Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Behold the rider on the white horse! Jesus lives and rides as the Conqueror of sin, death and the devil. He wears many crowns, none now made of thorns-and He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood. Is it the blood of His enemies, shed in battle for you, as our Old Testament lesson-Isaiah 63--proclaims? Perhaps, for the Lord has defeated His enemies. Or is the blood on the robe the blood of your Savior, the King of kings and Lord of lords? Again, perhaps, for His victory over sin and death came at the shedding of His own blood.

And behold the host that rides with Him! The armies of heaven are clothed in fine linen, white and clean. They have not shed blood, nor has their blood been shed; for the Lord alone has won the victory.

As these hosts are arrayed in white, so are you clothed as well, dear Christians. The Lord has removed the crimson stain of your sin, and so you stand before God pure and holy, for you wear the holiness of Christ.

Therefore ponder the two robes of our Lord in His Passion-the white robe that proclaims His personal innocence, and the purple robe that proclaimed His death for you. Ponder, and do not be dismayed, for the King of kings and Lord of lords lives and reigns! He who is called Faithful is faithful to His promises, for He who died and rose again promises forgiveness for all of your sins. He who is called True is true indeed, and He gives to you His true body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins, to strengthen and preserve you in baptismal grace unto life everlasting.

O Lord Jesus Christ, You who were innocently accused and condemned, may Your innocence redound to our benefit as poor sinners. You who endured every wrong with great patience, let Your patience be a comfort to us in our disobedience, and may it be held up as an example for us to follow. Let the white garment with which You were vested cover our blood-red sins, so that we may some day, clad in a white garment, eternally praise You before Your throne. Amen (Gerhard, An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 175)