Follow Jesus Sermon Series

"Follow the Hyssop" -- Psalm 51:7

Lent Midweek 5 Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

'Twas the mark of death and all feared it. Whosoever was thusly afflicted became unclean in the sight of God and excommunicated from the congregation. Unless there was a change, this is the way that life would decay until life was no more in this world. Thank God that the condition didn't always end this way. God's way of cleansing and restoration was by His Word with the living water and with the blood that was shed. The description of this holy rite is given in Leviticus 14 and includes the instrument of application ... hyssop on a cedar rod.

Specifically, the ordained servant of the Word "shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the scarlet stuff and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the living water; and he shall sprinkle it seven times upon him who is to be cleansed of leprosy; then he shall pronounce him clean" (v. 6-7).

The Bible goes on to tell what would then take place in order to restore the leper to the congregation. On the eighth day another sacrifice is made with all the things prescribed and "the priest who cleanses him shall set the man who is to be cleansed and these things before the LORD, at the Door of the Tent of Meeting" (v. 11). What grateful joy that man must have experienced. He could now cry out, "clean, clean!" He was physically clean in the sight of God and brought back to his family and to the congregation. How thankful his family and friends must have been to have the excommunicated man returned to them.

Thus far the body that was afflicted with a deadly skin disease called leprosy, and thus far the physical cleansing and societal restoration. So, what of the soul and the eternally dead, scaly affliction of the soul? For surely those conceived of a man and of a woman are born outside the Church and away from the gracious, merciful Presence of the LORD. Life in this world only adds layers of scale to the soul. The persistent committing of pet sins cut, knick and scar the soul at each occurrence producing thick, stony scar tissue over the years. Self-justifying of sinful behavior, telling little white lies, and selective impenitence callous the spirit and drive the dirt deep into the pores of one's soul. Is there a hyssop brush that may apply the means of grace to such a recalcitrant, sin-scarred and stained soul?

Dearly beloved, there is only One to Whom you may cry out and from Whom you will received the required and sufficient cleansing. This evening, as you "Follow the Hyssop," commit to memory the plea of a sorry man, a verse that was inspired by and preserved for the ages by the Holy Spirit in Psalm 51:7 ...

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God via the penitential pen of King David, sinner and saint.

Hyssop is a fibrous plant of God's good creation that, when bunched and affixed, is able to hold liquids for the purpose of sprinkling. The Bible informs us that Solomon studied various plants and "spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of the wall" (1 Kings 4:33). Centuries before David's wise son studied botany, hyssop was known as an instrument used in treating the sick, as with the cleansing of the leprous mentioned a few moments ago. The LORD God also prescribed the use for hyssop as He wrought the rescue of the children of Israel in the great deliverance from slavery.

In order to set the children of Abraham free - that is, the people from whom the Messiah would come - the shedding of blood would be required. For every family, in every house, a male lamb, without blemish, was sacrificed in order to stay the hand of the Angel of Death. "This is the LORD's Passover" (Exodus 12:11) and it is a gracious, merciful gift.

"Then Moses called all the elders of Israel, and said to them, 'Select lambs for yourselves according to your families, and kill the Passover Lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood which is in the basin; and none of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to slay the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not allow the Destroyer to enter your houses to slay you'" (v. 21-23).

Thus it was spoken and thus it was done. The LORD delivered His people out of the land of bondage and brought them on the way to the promised land. The Divine use of hyssop continued in the exodus of the congregation. The Lord God Almighty certainly desires that His Word, which is holy in itself, might be holy among the people ... both the Old Testament people of God and the members of the New Testament Israel; that is, the Church. Or, as both Testaments declare, "When every commandment of the Law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the Book itself and all the people, saying, 'This is the blood of the Covenant which God commanded you'" (Hebrews 9:19-20).

The poor soul may cry out for deliverance, saying, "I am in bondage to sin and if left alone, I shall surely die forever. I can not heal myself nor am I able to muster an inkling of faith. But I have heard Your Word which tells how You delivered Your people. I have heard Your Word which prescribed the daubing of the lamb's shed blood upon the doorposts and the headers. Is there not a daubing of Your Blood on my soul? I have heard how the hyssop was used in sprinkling the water and the blood upon all the people. Is there not such a sprinkling for this weary soul? Without You I am lost. This my secret heart knows right well. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in Thy sight, so that Thou art justified in Thy sentence and blameless in Thy judgment" (Psalm 51:3-4).

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Follow the hyssop and "behold the Lamb of God Which takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). In order for you to be whiter than snow, Jesus must be dirtier than darkness. Behold Christ being crucified on the cross of Calvary. In order for you to be washed of your sins in Baptism, Jesus must have the sins of the world washed up and placed upon Him. Behold Christ being baptized in the water of the Jordan. In order for you to be clean in the eyes of God, Jesus must be filthy in the sight of the Holy God. Behold Christ crying out from the cross in the night of the ninth hour, "'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' which means, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'" (Mark 15:34).

In order for you to be purged with hyssop, Jesus must even suffer because of man's cruel and wicked employment of hyssop. A final act of mercilessness caused the thirsty Savior to endure an awful burning pain. The Gospel records it: "After this Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfil the scripture), 'I thirst.' A bowl full of vinegar stood there; so they put a sponge full of the vinegar on hyssop and held it to His mouth. When Jesus had received the vinegar, He said, 'It is finished'; and He bowed His Head and gave up His Spirit" (John 19:28-30).

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Follow the hyssop for it is part of the continuing ministration of God's Word for the well-being and blessing of the soul. When confronted with the Law via Pastor Nathan, King David was convicted, became heartily sorry for his sin, looked to God, and confessed, "'I have sinned against the LORD.' And Nathan said to David, 'The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die'" (2 Samuel 12:13).

If you recall that David wrote Psalm 51 after his awful sins of adultery, murder and treachery, AND after he had been forgiven of all these same sins of his, then you begin to realize that the life of a Christian is one of on-going repentance and continued living in God's grace, mercy and peace. Therefore, pray the Psalm with this sense in mind:

"O LORD, continue to purge me with hyssop, and I shall continue to be clean. Continue to wash me, and I shall continue to be whiter than snow."

The public office of the Ministry of the Word carries and uses the hyssop as prescribed and instituted by the LORD. In the Old Testament this was done by the priests; in the New Testament it is done by the pastors since Jesus is the High Priest over the House of God. Today pastors cleanse the souls of infants, aged and in between with the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. They sprinkle the faithful people of God in the Absolution when they proclaim the forgiveness of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. And like the Leviticus 14 leper who presents himself at the Door of the Tent of Meeting in order to be in communion with the LORD and the others of the congregation, so also the faithful member who is prepared and who presents himself or herself to receive the Body and the Blood of Jesus for the remission of sins.

"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Dear Christian, follow the hyssop, for the daily application of this soul-soothing Gospel will sustain you until you depart in peace and are with the Lord Jesus in Paradise. According to His Word, Jesus

has prepared a place for all of His people where there are neither the ailments of the body nor the afflictions of the soul.

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living Way which He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His Flesh, and since we have a great priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:19-25). Amen.

"Now may the God of peace Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the Blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).