Luke 23:34
Midweek Lent 5 • March 28, 2007
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church • Boise, Idaho
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The Shamed

The Word of the Lord from Luke 23: "Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.' And they divided His garments and cast lots." (Luke 23:34)

The final verse of Genesis 2 is an awkward one: "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." A verse like that it likely to bring either giggles or awkward silence in a lot of Sunday school and confirmation classes; and, frankly, it's a verse to which we don't feel inclined to pay a lot of attention. It sounds embarrassing to talk about in our world as it is today.

That's part of the point. Our world, as it is today, is far different than that world undefiled. Adam and Eve were created a placed into a garden without sin. Without sin, there was therefore nothing along the way of lust or vanity or pride or covetousness. Without sin, there was no shame because there was no need for it. All was perfect and nothing needed to be hidden. Such a world is so difficult to imagine that it's nearly impossible to conceive that we stand on the same earth today. It was lost so quickly, too, as Adam and Eve scrambled to sew fig leaves directly after their first sin. Shame had come into the world.

To be sure, there is little shame left in our world today, but for all the wrong reasons. We are not short on shame because there is very little sin, but because man wears shame like a badge of honor. Although the media is an easy target, it's still a fair one. While wars are fought and lives are lost around the world by manmade and natural disaster, newspapers and programs as often as not are going to headline the latest provocative outfit or immoral act by some celebrity. It's truly a dangerous sign for society when people become obsessed with who is checking in and out of Hollywood rehab centers, or the latest chapter in their self-destructive course.

I bring this up mostly because I was irritated more than usual while contemplating what to write for this sermon. Shortly after the untimely death of one of our nation's young walking trainwrecks, I was flipping through the channels and heard an announcer say that they'd be showing a video from her early, *innocent* years…as a magazine centerfold.

Our society is quickly running out of shame. Activities which the Bible condemns are considered worthy of praise, Oscars and protective legislation. An honest day's work is for suckers, and it's considered far more ingenious to get ahead by winning the lottery or suing for emotional damages. Meanwhile, good and godly institutions like, say, marriage and fatherhood, are considered to be outmoded or the butt of jokes at best. Looking at our world, and what passes for entertainment these days, we do well to remember St. Paul's warning in Ephesians 5: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,

but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (Eph 5:11-12). If only shameful things were kept secret still.

Now, at this point in this little meditation, there are two great dangers about where we go from here. On the one hand, we can spend the rest of our time throwing stones at media darlings to make us feel better about ourselves, but that hardly brings us around to repentance and grace. On the other hand, I could preach on morality for a while, but I don't really think I have to spend a whole lot of time trying to convince the likes of you that Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan may not be the best role models for your daughters or granddaughters…or for your sons' or grandsons' future spouses.

Rather, the point I wish to make is this: we might laugh at the announcer who speaks of a centerfold model as innocent, but we still are daily tempted of believing that morality is relative, that we're pure enough because we're not as dirty as the world.

That's huge. Given the ongoing bombardment of media images, societal slogans and the slippery slide of opinions among friends or neighbors, it's a continuous struggle to keep some sort of a mindset that acknowledges God's Law. So you'll be tempted to believe that—of course—stealing is wrong, but ripping off mp3s or shortchanging the Federal Government is acceptable because everybody does it, or at least wants to do it. Or that while gossip is sinful, some stories must be told. Or, while that outfit isn't particularly modest, it's certainly not as bad as others that are out there. Or while you tend to look out for your own comforts first, at least you're far more giving than others.

Now, it may be absolutely true that you have more honesty and integrity than the general public, not to mention modesty and generosity. But then again, 90% of the population probably considers themselves in the top half of honest, modest and generous people. Indeed, as Christians it ought to be so. But always remember that, before God, stripped bare of all intentions and pretensions, you and I are far from holy. According to God's Law, we ought to be ashamed. Even if we don't feel ashamed, by faith we trust that our sins are shameful. Left in our sin on the Last Day, we'd want to hide like Adam and Eve, but that wouldn't be an option.

Beware of shamelessness. To feel no shame is to believe that there's no sin that needs forgiveness. To be unforgiven is to be lost.

I've spoken so far about the problem of shamelessness in society, but I'd better speak of another issue. There are, on the other hand, those who look upon their past and feel shame very deeply, who would give anything to erase something they've done that still curls their toes in embarrassment. But time doesn't run in reverse; and if this is you, you know that you can't remove your shame. Shame can be a blessing—if it drives you to repentance; but the devil can also use it to lead you into unforgiven despair. This, too, is to be lost.

The Good News, of course, is that you're not left in your sin—and although you can't remove shame, Jesus has removed it for you before God. That is one of the many things

He does for you in tonight's reading. There, your Savior is stripped bare—for along with the horrible pain, shame is part of the cruelty of crucifixion. There, He endures insults and jeers that might be true of you and me, but certainly not of Him. There, He is put to death for your sin, bearing your shame before His Father and suffering the judgment for your sin. Rather than curse those who shame Him, He prays for their forgiveness.

Your sins are part of His shame there; and so He prays for your forgiveness. Thus He has died for you, and now He is risen. And now, in Holy Baptism, He has clothed you with Himself, with His own righteousness and purity, so that God the Father sees only holiness, not sin. For Jesus' sake, God is not ashamed to be called your God, and God is not ashamed to call you His children. Take heart, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. For now, as long as sin clings to you, you must live with shame—some of which you feel all too deeply, some of which you believe only by faith. But before God, you are not shamed: for Jesus has removed all your sin and clothed you with His own holiness, that you might live with Him in righteousness, innocence and blessedness forever.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen