

Sermon Text (2 Chronicles 29:12–19 ESV)

¹² Then the Levites arose, Mahath the son of Amasai, and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi, and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah, and Eden the son of Joah; ¹³ and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; ¹⁴ and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. ¹⁵ They gathered their brothers and consecrated themselves and went in as the king had commanded, by the words of the LORD, to cleanse the house of the LORD. ¹⁶ The priests went into the inner part of the house of the LORD to cleanse it, and they brought out all the uncleanness that they found in the temple of the LORD into the court of the house of the LORD. And the Levites took it and carried it out to the brook Kidron. ¹⁷ They began to consecrate on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the LORD. Then for eight days they consecrated the house of the LORD, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished. ¹⁸ Then they went in to Hezekiah the king and said, “We have cleansed all the house of the LORD, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the showbread and all its utensils. ¹⁹ All the utensils that King Ahaz discarded in his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and consecrated, and behold, they are before the altar of the LORD.”

Jesus Has Cleansed Your Heart

The year was 1530. Emperor Charles V, who had been engaged in many wars up until this point, finally had some time to deal with the issue of the Lutherans. Many of the Lutheran leaders were summoned by him to the city of Augsburg, where he promised to hear them and weigh their opinions. There, a document was presented by the Lutherans that was called the Augsburg Confession, a document that is still included among our Lutheran Confessions to this day. It contains twenty-eight articles, the twenty-fourth of these articles addressing the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, or the Mass. In the article, the Lutherans addressed the accusation that they were abolishing the Mass. Not only did the Lutherans call these accusations false, but they also said that “[t]he Mass is held among [them] and celebrated with the highest reverence” (AC, XXIV, 1). Now, it was true that the Lutherans had made some changes to the celebration of the Mass. However, all that they were doing was getting rid of the practices that were bad and adding practices that were good. They did not make these changes lightly. In fact, if they did not have to make any changes,

they didn't. Changes were only made if they were beneficial. One of the changes that they made had to do with the language that the Mass was celebrated in.

At the time, the Mass was celebrated in Latin by the Catholic Church. In fact, there are still some Catholics who continue to celebrate the Mass in Latin, even though celebrating it in the local language has now become standard. Because the average layperson did not speak Latin, they did not understand what was being said, and that included the Latin hymns that were sung. However, at the same time, the people were accustomed to singing those Latin hymns. Therefore, the Lutherans kept the Latin hymns, but, as the Augsburg Confession says, "the parts sung in Latin [were] interspersed here and there with German hymns" (AC, XXIV, 2), which was done to teach the people through the singing of hymns.

Another change that was made by the Lutherans was that private Masses were discontinued. Now, there is nothing wrong with taking the Lord's Supper privately on occasion. However, at the time, private Masses were being abused. Because of the false teaching that there are still sins that we need to atone for, whenever someone felt guilty, he would go to the priest, and the priest would perform a Mass for him. These private Masses would even be said for the dead to reduce their time spent in purgatory. Therefore, as the Augsburg Confession says, "[t]his resulted in an infinite number of [private] Masses" (AC, XXIV, 23). In addition, people would have to pay a fee in order to have these private Masses performed for them. People would even set aside a certain amount of money in their wills that was to be used to pay for private Masses to be performed for them in order to reduce their time spent in purgatory. For this reason alone, the Lutherans stated that "private Masses were discontinued among [them], since hardly any private Masses were celebrated except for the sake of filthy gain" (AC, XXIV, 13).

Getting rid of those bad things that made their way into our worship and our places of worship is nothing new, nor did it begin in the Lutheran Reformation. We also hear of it happening in our reading for today. During the last year of his reign, King Ahaz had shut the doors of the temple. However, this does not mean that he had been rightly worshipping God up until that point. No, idolatrous practices were carried out from the beginning of his reign. The evidence of these idolatrous practices was found all throughout the temple, everything from vessels to the remains of idolatrous offerings. Therefore, when Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, became king, he cleansed the temple of all of its uncleanness. He considered this to be such an important task that we are told that he began the process of cleansing the temple "[i]n the first year of his reign, in the first month" (2 Chronicles 29:3). And this was no simple feat. There was so much uncleanness that it took the priests and the Levites eight days to cleanse the temple courts and eight more days to cleanse the sanctuary proper, sixteen days in total. Everything that was unclean was taken down to the brook Kidron. There, it could all be burned and its ashes could be swept away with the winter rains into the Dead Sea. In other words, the uncleanness that had defiled the temple was not just thrown out or moved to another location. It was completely destroyed. Once it had been cleansed of all uncleanness, the temple could finally be rededicated, and right worship could begin once again.

So far, all of you have probably been in complete agreement with what King Hezekiah, the priests, and the Levites did in Old Testament times, as well as what the Lutherans did during the time of the Lutheran Reformation. During both times, they took necessary actions to cleanse their worship and their places of worship. As a result, everything bad was gotten rid of, even destroyed. If our place of worship became defiled by practices and objects that were bad and unclean today, you would surely not allow it to stand and would also do what was necessary in order to cleanse it, right? That may be true when talking about our physical places of worship, but what about those

temples that you can't see? What about the temples of your hearts? Are you willing to do what is necessary to cleanse your hearts?

We may think that we are willing to do so. However, what types of things do we set up in our hearts that make our hearts unclean? Could it be shows or movies that we really enjoy watching but that also promote sinful lifestyles or depict God and true religion in negative ways? Could it be good shows and movies that we spend all of our free time watching, one after another, when we should be using our time wiser? Could it be our computers or other personal devices that we not only find ourselves constantly drawn towards and checking, even when we have other things that are more important to do, but that we may also find ourselves using to search and look at things that we don't want anyone else to know we are looking at? Are there places that you want to go or people who you want to see that make you want to keep checking the time as you sit here in church? There are any number of things that are not sinful in and of themselves, just like celebrating the Lord's Supper privately on occasion. However, they can become sinful depending on how we use them or how important they become to us. We do not necessarily need to respond by casting these things out of our lives completely, but, when those things do provide us with temptations to sin, we should rethink how we use them or how we think of them and try to change. However, even when we know that we are sinning and do make an attempt to change, there are those certain sins that we seem to always find ourselves coming back to and setting up in our hearts once again. We may think that we can do what is necessary to cleanse our hearts of all uncleanness, but we can't. In fact, our sinful nature doesn't want to.

Fortunately, we don't have to do what is necessary to cleanse our hearts, because Jesus already did. Just as the priests and the Levites removed all the uncleanness from the temple, Jesus picked up all of our uncleanness and carried it out of the temples of our hearts. And Jesus did not

just cast our uncleanness out or put it in a different place. He carried it with him all the way to the cross. As he hung on that cross, our uncleanness also hung on him, as though he was the one who was unclean. Then, when he died and breathed his last, our uncleanness died with him. There is no more of our uncleanness left. There are no more sins that we still have to atone for. Just as the uncleanness that was in the temple was completely destroyed by the Levites at the brook Kidron, our sins have been completely destroyed by Jesus on the cross.

The thing that was necessary to cleanse the temples of our hearts was an innocent sacrifice. Jesus was that innocent sacrifice. He was the lamb without blemish or defect, who all of the Old Testament sacrifices were pointing to. He offered himself up as the perfect sacrifice and shed his blood so that we would live. Because Jesus has already done everything that is necessary to cleanse our hearts, our hearts are cleansed indeed. They are cleansed in the blood of Jesus.

That is the message that brought Martin Luther such great joy and comfort all those years ago, it is the message that was so clearly confessed in the Augsburg Confession, and it is the message that the Lutherans made clear by the decluttering of their worship and their places of worship. It is not a new teaching that Martin Luther decided to introduce one day. It is the eternal truth that has been proclaimed since the beginning. Therefore, let us keep proclaiming that good news of the gospel, and let us proclaim it clearly and without anything cluttering it, for when we are made aware of the uncleanness of our sins and are left with guilty consciences, what better news is there than that there is nothing that we have to do to atone for our sins, because we are saved by Christ alone who has already done everything that is necessary to save us?