

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany  
January 26, 2020  
The Rev. Jamie Samilio  
Church of the Holy Cross

### **Lather, Rinse, Repeat.**

Lather, Rinse, Repeat. Virtually every shampoo bottle that has ever existed contains these three directions. It is simple, clear and states exactly what you are supposed to do. And, for best results, this process is meant to be repeated. Humans, we are programmed to follow patterns, we learn through repetition. If only being Christian were as simple as: Lather, Rinse, Repeat. I thought of this because of something Kevin preached last week about being washed clean in Baptism. He said, that the problem is, we just get dirty again. That image and those words about the repeated cycle of sin and redemption stuck with me. Washed clean, but we just get dirty again. Lather, Rinse, Repeat. In Baptism we are washed clean once and for all. But, here in this life, temptation is a constant, and we cycle through getting clean (forgiven) and getting dirty again (sin). Sin, Repent, Repeat. We just keep jumping into the water, over and over, hanging onto hope, trusting our faith to see us through.

Just prior to today's Gospel, Jesus was Baptized, went into the desert and was tempted by the devil, then he returned to find that John was in prison. Now, John had criticized Herod for his immoral life, and oppressive economic practices. The Roman Empire did everything it could to intimidate and eliminate threats like John—people who had the courage to call out injustice. This was occupied territory, and these were conquered people. Brutality, poverty, and hunger, had become a way of life, and few people had hope. Oppression can crush hope, at any time, they could be charged with false crimes or enslaved, for just being who they were created to be. This was a land of deep darkness. I know for myself, that when my sense of safety and security is taken away, it is frightening, and fear can become my driver. When I act out of fear, the big picture becomes unfocused, and that keeps me from seeing hope in the future. As a church, there is a cost to confronting accepted social norms. But, the cost of not challenging injustice, is much greater. We risk the loss of our identity as a church—founded on the life of Jesus, who stood up to injustice on behalf of all of us. A church that remains silent in the face of injustice, is a contradiction in terms. Initially, the churches in Nazi Germany ignored the atrocities committed by the regime. They were considered them “social adjustments,” impacting only a few groups, for the good of the nation. At first it was easy to ignore, it was just one group, and few people were impacted. As the people accepted the changes, positioned for the economic, medical, and social good of everyone—a new normal crept in. By the time it became clear how widespread the injustice was, it was too late. Our Christian identity is at stake when we fail to speak against injustice. We forget who we are, and we forget whose we are. Ignore. Accept. Awaken.

“...the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death, light has dawned.” Jesus is the light, and Jesus took a stand against injustice, so that darkness would no longer be the norm. What have we accepted as our new norms? What are we living with we never thought possible, and how dangerous is it to our Christian identity? Jesus is the light, and by trusting Him, comes our cure for hopelessness. Author Corrie ten Boom said, “When a train goes through a tunnel, and it gets dark, you don't throw away your ticket and get off. You trust the engineer.” Jesus is the light, and our engineer, but we are still responsible for our actions. Think. Pause. Respond.

I wonder, if for some of us, the light that comes into our darkness is, blinding. I am not sure anyone wants to be thrust under a glaring interrogation lamp. Your conscience barking at you, “You know what you did, are you sorry for that? You should be ashamed, now ask for forgiveness!” *Blinded by the light*—what I know of human nature is, that sometimes people prefer the chaos and darkness they know, then to turn and change. How many of us have managed to stay standing in the light, yet, have put on sunglasses to

shade us from having to face the whole truth about the light, and our life? I think some of those shades are rose colored, and others are tinted with whatever prejudice our society has painted on them. Our view of life can become clouded if we do not clean the lenses, we need to be aware of the impact our actions have on others. Think. Pause. Respond.

Brazilian author Paulo Coelho Wrote: “A young couple moved into a new neighborhood. The next morning while they were eating breakfast, the young woman saw her neighbor hanging the washing outside. ‘That laundry is not very clean; she doesn’t know how to wash correctly. Perhaps she needs better laundry soap.’ Her husband looked on, remaining silent. Every time her neighbor hung her washing out to dry, the young woman made the same comments. A month later, the woman was surprised to see a nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband, ‘Look, she’s finally learned how to wash correctly. I wonder who taught her this?’ The husband replied, ‘I got up early this morning and cleaned our windows.’ And so it is with life... What we see when watching others depends on the clarity of the window through which we look. So, don’t be too quick to judge others, especially if your perspective of life is clouded by anger, jealousy, negativity or unfulfilled desires. Judging a person does not define who they are. It defines who you are.” We need to be aware, of things like economic, educational, cultural, and racial inequality, access to medicine, and food desserts. While we may not personally experience these injustices, as Christians we are called to stand up for those who do. Think. Pause. Respond.

The psalmist says, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? ...of whom then shall I be afraid?” What are you afraid of? If I am honest, I am afraid of me. I am the one who puts on sunglasses and goes to play in the mud after being washed clean—those are my decisions. Regardless of influence, I am responsible for what I do in this world. Still, I fall into temptation, I follow the crowd, and instead of pledging allegiance to Jesus, I align myself with pride, greed, lust, envy, sloth—you know the rest. We all need to turn back to God again and again, ask for forgiveness, and then, try to live the life God intends. A life, based on love, kindness, and compassion. Believe. Hope. Help.

*We are a resurrection people—people who claim the Christian identity. We are people of death and of new life, of endings and of new beginnings. We fall down and rise again. Sometimes, it is so hard to live a Christian life. I pray that we experience all-embracing love, hope, and accompaniment along the way. Because we need each other to remember this: that after death, there is life. Abundant, beautiful life, the likes of which we could never imagine. \* Believe. Hope. Help.*

I want to leave here today full of hope. I want you to believe that you are enough, just as you are, to stand directly in the light of Christ—no sunglasses needed. I want to help you to have courage, listen to your heart, and focus on Jesus. Because, what you do in this world, matters. It is through us, our words and actions that the good news is spread. We are Jesus’ disciples, and it is us who are fishing for people, spreading the good news through our net-works.

Jesus says, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” Another translation reads, “Be not afraid, for I will make you fish for people.” This translation guided me through my ordination process, and I decided to make a beaded necklace using Morse code. I love spelling out messages on bracelets and necklaces in Morse code, using different shaped beads for the dots and dashes. I found a cool fish pendant as the center piece, and started beading the passage into a necklace. It was challenging and precise work—I had to re-string it more than once! I finally finished it, and I sat down to meditate with the necklace. Carefully reading each bead. I read aloud, Be afraid... wait, what? Be afraid? What happened to be *not* afraid? “Be afraid, for I will make you fish for people.” I missed a word, but how? I already strung it a million times, and I planned! You know what they say when you plan, right? God laughs. I believe that God has a sense of humor. The words, “Be afraid, for I will make you fish for people.” was a message. It was God’s way of telling me that being a priest, was not going to be easy. Following Jesus is not easy, as scripture often reminds us. If only there were “shampoo like” instructions on how to maintain

our Christian identity. Perhaps, something like: Love. Forgive. Serve. Yes, Love. Forgive. Serve. Say it with me: Love. Forgive. Serve, for best results, repeat daily. AMEN.

+++ Resources +++

- Isaiah 9:1-4; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23; Psalm 27:1, 5-13
- [https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=4366](https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4366)
- **Samuel A. Cartledge** Associate Professor of New Testament; Director of MA(TS) Program, Columbia Theological Seminary, Columbia, Ga.
- **Jane Lancaster Patterson**, Associate Professor of New Testament and Director of Community Care, Seminary of the Southwest Austin, Texas
- Author **Corrie ten Boom**: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrie\\_ten\\_Boom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corrie_ten_Boom)
- Brazilian author **Paulo Coelho**: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo\\_Coelho](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulo_Coelho)
- The Rev. Jill Olds, who inspired me in a post from the Holy Land, to remember that we need each other to remind each other that after death there is beautiful, abundant life.