

How Heavy Guilt Weighs

Sermon for the 2nd Sunday of Easter

Sermon Text: Colossians 2:12-15



¹² Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.

Last week, Jonas made another mistake. He got onto the streetcar without a ticket. Unfortunately, things didn't end well. An officer observed him with a stern expression and after a short discussion, issued a heavy fine. Now, Jonas must take 65 Euros out of his precious allowance and pay the city. Actually, the part about the ticket is a pretty simple thing. You just have to dig a little deeper into your pocket and maybe live a little more frugally until the whole thing is over and forgotten at some point. Unfortunately, our guilt is not so easy to wipe from the table. One always hears this sentence from relationship counselors: One of the biggest obstacles of love is the past, with its old connections, failures, disappointments, and hurts. The past repeatedly announces itself and shows us that mistakes and hurts are not so easy to wipe from the table. Guilt somehow appears to belong so deep in humanity that we absolutely cannot live without doing wrong somewhere and to someone. Every time I order a delicious meal at a restaurant or drive my car, my conscience reminds me that there is a thing called a "global footprint." Yes, without having even dared to step into the beautiful Spring sun, I have a huge account of guilt which is to the detriment of the whole world. It is therefore impossible not to imagine that we humans become guilty and have guilt. But how do I deal with this? Some try to get rid of the feelings of guilt with bravado, according to the motto: "so long as I don't get caught, it doesn't bother me at all." There's a surprising number of people who get through life with such an attitude. People will also most likely not be caught if they take public transportation without a ticket! But unfortunately, the issue of guilt is not so simple. Guilt is like a scale – I can still twist and turn a lot...the needle relentlessly shows that there is something very heavy to bear here, psychologists and counselors also say that there is something heavy to carry. Again and again they have to deal with people who can't come to terms with guilt. And no matter how much you value the positive sides of people to balance them out against all the mistakes, in the end, guilt cannot be removed from people. In John's Gospel, there is a very interesting conversation between Jesus and the Pharisee Nicodemus. Nicodemus wasn't guiltier than anybody else. However, he wanted to be even better and like so many, wanted to look even better. He was probably of the opinion that he could find a good counselor in Jesus who could show him how he could live better. Nicodemus had to have been shocked when Jesus presented His radical life plan: Man must be born again completely and if a person is not born again, he can't come into God's kingdom. In this conversation that Jesus had with this Pharisee, it becomes clear that we humans can't free ourselves from guilt. People will not get better through good works nor meditation nor ignoring all our past mistakes. Something much bigger must happen to us.

In the letter to the Colossians, Paul describes these things in a song that the first church probably sang back then. In this song, Paul says to us what happens with us Christians:

First, we have died and been buried with Christ.

Second, we are raised to new life with Christ.

Third, our guilt is wiped away.

What the letter to the Colossians describes here is a radical solution that places Jesus against the entire weight of humanity. Nothing else helps against all of humanity's guilt, as well as our own personal guilt than the radical solution...death. Nothing more can be asked of a dead man. Whoever is dead also leaves behind no environmental footprints. Even past mistakes are simply wiped out with death because no one can be held accountable. The letter to the Colossians sings about how we can lay our whole lives in Jesus' death. We can nail our guilt onto Jesus' cross. To understand this concept a little better, we must delve a little into the intellectual world of the New Testament. In the world of that time, the debtor must write about his guilt personally in a letter. This same letter was then brought to a government depository where it came to be with many other similar letters. Paul uses this image and tells us: humans are all guilty. We have written our guilt down with our own hands on a piece of paper. This guilt is of our own doing. We are responsible. And then comes Jesus. He takes our letter of guilt out from among the pile of letters and nails it to His cross. Again, we have to delve into the intellectual world of the New Testament to understand this. When someone was crucified at that time, his guilt was nailed to the top of his cross so that all would understand why the person had to die on the cross. Now Paul tells us: Jesus is the Crucified One. But our guilt, not His guilt, is nailed to the top of His cross. That means that it is visible to everyone, to the spiritual and worldly forces. This guilt is paid! It is once and for all crossed out. It no longer exists. That is the radical solution to guilt that Jesus gives people! Guilt is wiped out through Jesus' death!

But not just this: We can also receive new life through Jesus. We now no longer live for ourselves. Our life is buried in Christ, in God, just as the letter to the Colossians later shows in chapter 3. In his letter and using his own experiences, Paul describes what this life in Christ means. Paul often reports very honestly about himself. He also constantly talks about his own personal weaknesses and sins. And yet, faith repeatedly shines through – real life, real hope, and the real goal is hidden in Christ. In our life here on earth, all of that is not yet revealed. We still have to fight with sin and guilt. We still live with our many hurts – that we do to others and that we must endure from other people. But these things don't sadden our gaze. We look beyond the debris field. In the distance, we see beyond the fuming squadrons of Satan, sin, and death to the cross of Jesus.

And that is where we get to the main point of the song from the letter to the Colossians that we would like to sing today. The book of Colossians actually sings about the fact that our guilt is nailed to the cross and that Jesus has therefore triumphed over the power of evil. Jesus actually doesn't just hang powerlessly on the cross. No, there HE is victorious over sin, death, and the devil. He victoriously confirmed all this when He rose from the dead. In those days, when a king triumphed over another country, the victorious king would parade in all his glory. The king received a crown and was the first to ride at the head of the parade as a winner. Behind him came his best soldiers, then the spoils of war, and at the very end, naked and exposed, came the defeated foe. Paul uses this very picture and says to us: Jesus is our victorious King. He shows the whole visible and invisible world that He has conquered evil. We come directly behind Him. We carry within us the stamp of Jesus' victory – which is baptism!

Instead of the guilt that accuses us, we now bear Jesus' resurrection on and in our bodies. And behind us come all the things that previously frightened us and made us guilty. These are the three powers that burdened our souls so heavily and burned in our souls and conscience – sin, death, and the devil. But in Jesus, their hands are tied, they are naked and powerless. Because of Jesus, they can't harm us. Through Jesus' victory, we also are victorious over these three powers!

This victory of Jesus over the powers of evil is not visible to the human eye. Furthermore, I will still have to pay one or two fines. And then there are still countless other things that make me feel bad, even the things I wish had never happened. I will surely have to fight against such guilt in my life until my last breath. Some things are so simple, like a fine that I have to pay. Other things are difficult, and I am constantly powerless and crushed under this overwhelming weight. And that's exactly why I run every day, every hour, to the cross. I see it there! My guilt! My sins! My conscience! These things are nailed to the cross. They can't touch me. I stand there and pray to Jesus and worship Him. And He repeatedly says: "Paid for you!" Amen.