

**Sunday of the Fulfillment**  
**Last Sunday in the Church Year**  
**November 21, 2021**  
**Proper 29**

**The Lessons:**       Isaiah 51:4-6  
                               Psalm 93  
                               Jude 20-25  
                               Mark 13:24-37

**The Hymns:**       # 336                    *Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending*  
                               # 506                    *Glory Be to God the Father*  
                               # 941                    *We Praise You and Acknowledge You*

**The Collect:** Lord Jesus Christ, so govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your glorious return, we may persevere in both faith and holiness of living; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

**The Sermon:**  
 Sunday of the Fulfillment  
 Jude 20-25

The Word of the Lord from the epistle of Jude: Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The book of Jude is the shortest book in the Bible, consisting of only one chapter. And since we don't often hear a reading from Jude I thought that we should consider this text for our sermon today.

I. Priests in Filthy Clothes

However, our sermon on Jude actually begins in the third chapter of the Old Testament book of Zechariah. There the prophet saw a vision of Joshua, the high priest at that time standing before the Angel of the Lord. In this vision, next to Joshua stood Satan to oppose him, to accuse him before God and show his unworthiness. As for Joshua himself, he was hardly faultless as he stood in the presence of God. Instead of newly cleaned High Priestly garments, Joshua was clothed in filthy garments—not just tinged with grime, but downright filthy. That was a violation of the Law for the high priest before the Lord, and a proclamation of his sinfulness.

But this vision was about more than one man, for it was about all the city of Jerusalem: if this was the condition of the man who stood between God and His people, what did this say about the condition of God's people? Surely, they were all filthy with sin. Surely, they were all unworthy of the Lord's grace. When Satan stood there to accuse Joshua, the high priest, he was there to accuse all of God's people. The filth of Joshua's robe was his exhibit A.

But the Lord would have none of it. He spoke, and His powerful, living Word crushed the accuser's hopes. To Satan, He said, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" Then the Lord commanded those who stood before Him to remove Joshua's filthy clothes, and declared to him, "See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes."

So the Lord spoke, and Joshua's filthy garments and filthier sin were removed from him; instead, he was clothed in rich robes and righteousness, able to be in the presence of the Lord. Satan's case thus went down in flames, because the Lord spoke His Word and plucked His people like a burning stick from the fire.

Now, as the short, 25-verse epistle of Jude concludes, it speaks of **YOU** being faultless before the glorious presence of God. It's a beautiful, blessed image; but the first 19 verses of the epistle declare how unlikely it is. In fact, this short letter of Jude warns the people of God of a variety of sins that the devil, your own sinful flesh, and false teachers of the world use to seduce you away from your salvation. In those 19 verses, he rattles off nearly as many sins, some of which will seek to drill directly into your own soul.

He warns of turning God's grace into lewdness, using forgiveness as an excuse to indulge in whatever sins you find pleasurable. How easy it is to abuse forgiveness as a sort of get-out-of-jail-free card. But to misuse God's grace so will harden your heart until you just go ahead and sin without bothering to ask for forgiveness, and assume you're just forgiven anyway—when you are not.

He warns of the sin of the Israelites in the wilderness, who followed the Lord out of Egypt toward the Promised Land, but then began to complain about His Word and His ways on their journey. How tempting it will always be for you to believe that you follow God **in principle**, but that there are certain **changes** and **improvements** you must make on His will, since He doesn't quite understand your special needs.

Remember, and take it seriously: when the people complained against God's will in the wilderness, He struck them down for their unbelief.

Jude warns against the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, of those who pursue unnatural desires, and all sorts of sexual immorality, as God's gifts of intimacy and procreation are twisted to deny His grace and goodness altogether. Given the bombardment of images and words and temptations today, sexual purity is rare.

Jude further warns against those who, in defiling their flesh, **reject** authority and speak evil of it. In other words, those who warn **against** immorality will be rejected and slandered by those who glorify it. Few today have the courage to stand and denounce such sin.

The list of sins continue. You will be tempted to follow your own natural inclinations and believe that to be God's will, thinking "It feels natural and right, so it must be right."

And so, you'll be tempted to believe that what feels natural to your sinful nature is purer than what God demands.

You'll be tempted to the sins of Cain, who envied Abel for his faithful sacrifice; and while you may not become a murderer, you may well despise those whom you consider better Christians than yourself, whatever that may mean.

You'll be tempted to the error of Balaam, selling out your faith and your integrity in order to gain what you covet, since it's easy to take coveting more seriously than faith.

You'll be tempted to the sins of Korah, who rejected God's appointment of Moses as His spokesman and wanted to call himself as the prophet to the people.

You'll be tempted to dissatisfaction and discontent, to grumble and complain in order to get what you desire. You'll be tempted to flatter people and enlist them on your side, using them to gain advantage and get your way. Tempted by desire and a mockery of God's will, you'll also be tempted to cause divisions because you believe your way is right.

All of this is in those first nineteen verses of Jude. Furthermore, this is not a portrayal of the world out there, while Christians remain safe inside the church's walls. These are sins that the devil will use to rip apart the people of God and to wrench you from the faith if he can, consigning you to the fires of hell.

It's a fitting text on this Last Sunday of the church year as we ponder our Lord's Judgment at the end of the world, because the world will only grow worse before the end—and Christians only lonelier in the faith. It's difficult for me to imagine that the world could depart from God's Word a whole lot more than it has.

In any event, this short epistle lists all sorts of sins that seek your spiritual death today. Examine yourself by all these sins, and remember that, as James tells us, to sin once is to break the whole law (James 2:10).

There is only one conclusion: left to yourself, you stand before God in a filthy robe like Joshua. Isaiah tells us that all of our righteousness is like a filthy rag (Isaiah 64:6).

Apart from Christ and His righteousness, the devil's accusations about you and your sin are correct: you're far too filthy-sinful to be in God's presence forever.

## 2. Faultless and Joyful

The Good News, of course, is that you're not left apart from Christ, because Christ has joined you to Himself. He who has redeemed you by His own blood and death on the cross has joined you to Himself, to His death and resurrection, in Holy Baptism. There, He removed your filthy robe of sin. There, He clothed you with His own righteousness.

That's what St. Paul declares in Galatians: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:27). Therefore, if the devil was to stand before God's throne and accuse you of your sin, Jesus Christ would readily say, "I rebuke you, Satan. The one whom you accuse is one for

whom I have died, one whom I have cleansed with my own righteousness. Depart from Me, you and your lies.”

As the devil has no chance before God, he speaks his accusations to you. One of his ploys is to drive you to despair, accuse you of your sin by saying, “Look at all your sin. Look at how defiled you are. Your robe is filthy, and you surely cannot stand before God!” At which point, you can respond, “So what? I do not plan to impress God with my righteousness, for I have none. I stand clothed with Jesus and His righteousness, and for His sake God has given me eternal life.”

When that is your confession of faith, the devil has no accusations left. Like God’s people in Zechariah 3, Jesus has plucked you like a brand from the fire, refined and tempered by His work. Like the high priest Joshua, He has removed your filthy robes and clothed you in His perfect righteousness.

All of this finally leads us to our text proper for this day. Knowing now the many sins with which the devil will try to seduce and destroy you, and assured that Christ has won your salvation by His death and made you His, how then shall you live? Our text tells you how you are to live:

“But you, beloved, build yourselves up in your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.”

How shall you live? Build yourselves up on your most holy faith, says the text—the faith that God has declared to you. Continue to confess your sins and rejoice that Christ has redeemed you. Remain in the love of God and the mercy of Jesus Christ: continue to receive the grace that your loving Father sent His Son to give.

Continue to receive the mercy that Jesus offers, because He has already suffered the judgment for your sin. It is His love and mercy, not yours, that leads unto eternal life.

How shall you live? Keep your robe on—your robe of Christ’s righteousness. Continually examine yourself; and confess the truth that you cannot stand in God’s presence on your own merit, but that for Jesus’ work of salvation you surely will.

As to the work of the Church, the text says this:

“And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by sin.”

As God’s Church on earth, Christians are to have compassion. They are to pull others out of the fire—and how is this done? By proclaiming to them God’s Word—that Law which shows them how filthy their robes are, and the Gospel that declares that Jesus is their Savior. By this Word, the Holy Spirit does the work of salvation. That is how Joshua was plucked from the fire and made clean; that is still the only way that people are saved for eternal life. To proclaim God’s Word is Christian compassion; we do so with joy.

We therefore compassionately proclaim God’s Word, and we do so with this distinction: we hate the garment defiled by the flesh. We hate that filthy robe of sin that is naturally ours. Therefore, we don’t

make room for all those sins that would lead us away: while so many churches sadly declare that immorality is no longer a sin, the Lord gives us no permission to do so.

We therefore maintain the distinction between truth and error, right and wrong; because to make allowances for sin is to lie, to tell people that they can wear filthy robes into God's presence. That's a false teaching that leaves them in the fire.

So rather than giving permission to sinfully stumble, we gladly proclaim Jesus Christ, who is able to keep you from stumbling; but should you fall, He has grace to clothe you with His righteousness once more.

We proclaim Christ crucified, who has rebuked the devil and clothed you with His righteousness in your Baptism. We proclaim Christ crucified, present with you also in His Word and Supper, to forgive your sins. And because He forgives your sins, you are prepared for the day when He will present you faultless before Him in glory, with exceeding joy.

To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.