

There are many contemporary images of Christ. There is the image of Christ, the clown in Godspell. There is the image of Jesus Christ, Superstar. There is Jesus Christ the revolutionary. I would like to add one more image to that list. I would like us to think, today, of Jesus Christ the garbage man.

Does that sound sacriligious to you? I don't believe it is. Why is it that we have no problem identifying Jesus with people of high status such as doctors or business people but we think that it's sacriligious to think of Jesus in terms of an occupation that has very little status in our society? I think that the One whose birth in a crummy stable we celebrate this month and who was a friend especially of men and women of low status would like to be identified with garbage men.

This is where I got the idea of Jesus as a garbage man. Thursday morning when I was getting up two thoughts were paramount. The first thought was that I must get to work on my sermon this morning. The second thought was that I must not forget to take out the garbage. Thursday is the

day the garbagemen come. Then, all of a sudden, a light bulb turned on inside my head. My text is that Jesus came to take away sins, just like the garbagemen come to take away my garbage. And within a moment my whole sermon came to me.

You see, the day the garbage truck comes is a big day in our household. Once a week Kay and I go around to each room and empty the waste baskets. We take the gathered, yukky stuff down to the kitchen where we add it to the large waste can there. Then I take it outside to the garbage cans and take them out to the street for the garbage-men to take away. This is one of the big events of the week. They boys line up at the windows to watch and to wave and then they play garbage truck for the rest of the day. They are terribly disappointed if they miss the garbage truck. As a result I have begun to associate the taking away of sins with the taking away of garbage. And the garbageman, far from being someone to make jokes about or to look down upon, has become a Christ figure for me. ~~And so from now on I hope that~~

~~when you see a garbage man or a garbage truck you will think of Christ and how he came to take away our sins.~~

Christ is a garbageman in that he comes to take away the garbage that clutters up our lives. He came to take away our sins. Our sins are like garbage. For example, if our garbage isn't taken away it begins to smell up our homes, and if our sins aren't taken away they begin to smell up our lives. Garbage attracts all sorts of creatures like rats, mice, cockroaches and flies. Our sins also attract creatures of the darkness that begin to gnaw on our souls like rats gnawing at garbage. Garbage provides a good atmosphere for disease, sickness and death, and sin is the disease of our souls that brings sickness and eternal death to us. Garbage also separates us from our neighbors. The family that has garbage all over their house and yard won't have many friends. Sin separates us from our neighbors also, and from God as well. Think of how your sin has cut you off from mom or dad, brother or sister, husband or wife. Think

of how it cuts you off from God. And, finally, garbage doesn't do much for our self-esteem. My wife, Kay, did her master's thesis at Penn State on how the clothes we wear reflect upon our self-esteem. People with low self-esteem are often very disheveled and dirty in appearance. They don't care how they look. It has nothing to do with having new or expensive clothes. Some people who have the shabbiest clothing wear them proudly, while some people with very expensive clothing can always appear dissheveled. In the same way, people whose homes are cluttered with garbage are usually people with very low self-esteem. A lot of times people feel like garbage. Sin doesn't do much for our self-esteem either. The presence of sin in our lives, like garbage in our yards, is a blow to our self-esteem. I truly believe that most of us continue in sins because we think so little of ourselves. "What difference does it make if I keep this garbage in my life. I am nothing. What am I worth? I'm never going to be anything." But when a person believes he or

she is created in the image of God and that God has lavished his love on us that we should be called children of God there is a proper kind of self-esteem that wants to get rid of the garbage that clutters up our lives.

I take it for granted that most of us want both our garbage and our sins taken away. I am taking for granted that you are here this morning because you want your sins taken away and taken away on a regular basis, just like you have your garbage taken away. One of our elders, Dave Vander Weide the elder, recently shared with me a message preached by Dr. Joel Nederhood of the Christian Reformed Church. I thought it was so good I wrote for more for the narthex. One of the things he said is that a Christian, by being a member of a church, is making a confession that he or she needs and wants his or her sins taken away.

Jesus knows our needs, and wants to meet them. He was born to take away our sins. According to the great biblical scholar, Bishop Westcott, the dominant thought of our text is the thought of

our Lord's utter hostility to sin in every shape. Jesus hates the garbage that clutters up our lives, that destroys our self-esteem, that breeds disease and soul sickness, that provides the atmosphere for all sorts of creatures of the dark to enter our hearts and gnaw away. He hates everything that destroys us and makes us look bad. That's why he came, to take away our sins.

But how do we get Him to take away our sins?

We all know how to get rid of our garbage. We simply clean up our houses, empty it into garbage cans, and take it out to the curb to be taken away. But how do we have our sins taken away? We invite Jesus ^{through prayer} to come into our hearts and clean them up. We invite him to come into each room in our lives and empty out the trash cans. We invite him to go into the closets where we have hidden things that we want know one to discover, and we ask him to take away the shameful things that are in there. We invite him to go up into the attic of our lives where our thoughts need to be cleaned up and our covetousness, lust, bitterness, and ungrateful thoughts are smelling up our minds. We invite Him

into the basement of our lives and ask him to clean up even the sub-conscious and unconscious thoughts and urges that are the source of all our actual sinful thoughts, words and actions.

Can you imagine asking the garbageman to come into your home and clean it up? There is where the analogy breaks down. One of our members works for the Town of Tonawanda and one of his jobs is to take away the garbage. Now I think he and I have a pretty good relationship but I can't imagine asking him, not only to take away the garbage that I have placed out on the curb, but to come in and clean up the house as well. His job is simply to take away. But Jesus comes in and cleans up and helps us to clean up. He cleans up and takes away all our garbage-sins and he does it all for free. We only have to ask Him.

Now think of who this is who will come in. He isn't someone down and out and willing to do anything for a buck. He is the Lord of heaven. One of my favorite Christmas hymns says it this way,

He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all
And his shelter was a stable
And his cradle was a stall
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

Think of what that does for our self-esteem when we have the Lord of all living in us.

The apostle John says something in our Scripture lesson, though, that might cause concern for most of us. He writes, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him."

John doesn't mean that Christians are perfect and that we never sin. If that were so none of us could call ourselves Christians because we all sin. Just as the garbage piles up in the house from week to week and needs to be carried out, so sins pile up in our lives even as Christians. That's one reason we come to church. Joel Nederhood writes, "The church is the place where broken-hearted sinners come together to get rid of their terrible burdens.... It's the place where confessed transgressors of God's law receive God's

pardon.... The confessing church is the place to be if you want to be free from your guilt and your slavery." But unlike our garbage which we take out only once a week to be taken away, we need to have our sins taken away every day. That's why I get up early every morning to have my devotions. One day last week I got up early and, instead of taking a shower first and going downstairs for my devotions, I simply knelt in my pajamas by the side of my bed. Kay was still very sleepy but managed to open one eye long enough to ask what I was doing. I told her I was taking out the garbage. She said, "Oh" and rolled over and went back to sleep. I had gotten up to pray and one of the first things I do when I pray is ask God to forgive me and take away the sins that have piled up.

So John doesn't expect us to be without sin when he writes, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning." What John does mean is this. Our lifestyles will be significantly changed when Jesus comes into take away our sins. He comes into us and we entered into him. We begin to get into

him in such a way that we don't like garbage lying around anymore. It doesn't happen all at once. It often happens slowly. We no longer let the garbage pile up to attract the rats and create the smells ^{that} ~~and~~ rob us of our self-esteem. So we go to work, with the help of Christ our friend and Saviour, to overcome those habits and to change that lifestyle which clutters our lives with garbage. It's a lifelong process. We do this because we have the hope that God will make us one day like Jesus Christ so that when he comes again we will be just like Him. "Everyone who has this hope purifies himself."

Maybe your life is cluttered with the garbage of sin. It's making you sick inside perhaps. The sin in your life has attracted all sorts of unsavory friends and creatures. Maybe you look at your life and you think, "It really smells because of all this garbage in it." And maybe you don't think much of yourself because you think you aren't as smart or beautiful or handsome or

successful as someone else. Maybe you are so down on yourself that you have just resigned yourself to living a life cluttered with all this garbage that is cutting you off from your friends and neighbors and God. You know about Jesus, how he was a friend of sinners. You have heard about him all your life. You admire Him. You respect him. And deep down you know that he can and wants to take away the garbage. "You know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins." Deep down in your mind and heart I can hear you inviting him in and asking him to clean up and take all your sins away.

Into my heart
Into my heart'
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.
Come in today.
Come in to stay.
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.

AMEN