

## Sermon Text for June 5, 2016

*by Rev. Robert K. Bronkema*

Ephesians 4: 22-25. Genesis 35: 1-4

### **“Change Your Clothes”**

How exciting it was last week to be able to take part in 8 baptisms. It was so refreshing last week after the service a family that has been attending stopped me and said you know the main questions we want to know about the church is what do you believe about baptism and do you celebrate communion on a regular basis? They came when Brett preached and we had communion and then again last week when we had 8 baptisms. I felt like it was a walk off, or a bat flip, that’s all they needed to know. But at the root of the baptisms and at the root of the communion that we will be taking today is a recognition that God calls us to radically transform and change our minds and our hearts and our way of life. Today, Jacob finds himself faced with the same reality where he recognized that something in his life and in the lives of those who were with him, simply had to change. The Apostles Paul tells us in Ephesians that we have to put away our former way of life, we have to be renewed, transformed. Jacob commands his people to change their clothes as a symbolic way in which they would know that they had been changed. Let’s see how we are challenged to metaphorically change our clothes today as well.

### **READ**

Did you notice that one of the promises that the new member and those being baptized last week was that they would renounce sin. If you have come here today searching for a way to be made right with God, the first step has to be a renouncing of sin.

That renunciation of sin is possible for us today because of the blood of Jesus Christ that purifies us, washes us clean and allows us to take on, to put on, to be clothed, as Ephesians states with a new self, the same self that was created in the likeness or the image of God which is true righteousness. We are striving today to return to that image, to take off the old sinful self and put on the new righteous self made in the image of God.

There are a lot of people today who have been waiting for an opportunity to change their lives. There are a lot of families who have been wanting to do something

different, have a different approach to their lives together. The church can serve as an outlet of change and a vehicle for transformation. Look around you and you will see families, individuals, couples looking to do something meaningful because of a transition that they have experienced in their lives.

St. Francis of Assisi once said that God has worked through all things unholy. If he can work through me, he can work through anyone. Today we are going to learn that even in our sinfulness, even in our impurity, imperfection, dereliction, criminality, hostility, and apathy, God can work through us.

In Genesis today Jacob is challenged to serve God, but before he takes a single step, before he raises his hand and volunteers he does something that we have to do before we go forward as a church, as individuals, as a nation and that is we must recognize our impurity. We have to make things right with God, because God has already made it right with us through Jesus Christ.

Jacob today is told to pick up his things and go. Just like his grandfather Abraham before him, Jacob is challenged with a major change and transition in his life. He is told to go to Bethel. Now Beth-el means literally house of God. Beth means house, like Bethlehem which means house of bread. And El means God like El Shaddai which means God almighty.

Once Jacob gets this command he calls his household together, and even those who are not directly in his family. He tells them “Okay people God is calling us to move, but we are not going anywhere until we are made right before God. That means that we have to put away all of those idols that we have lying around in our houses. We have to purify ourselves by taking a bath and finally once we are clean internally with worshipping the one true God and being clean with the bath, we have to change our clothes. We have to change our clothes so that our outside appearance, our actions, what people see of us matches the inner purity that we have from God. Once we have done this then we can go.

The order of this transformation is crucial and we should be able to use it in our lives. First we must get rid of the idols in your life. Today nobody really has the types of idols in their houses that they did back then. I mean, none of you have little figurines that every time you walk into the house you bow to or kiss or even pray to. I guess the closest

thing we have to that is the television where we pay our respects to it by turning it on every time we walk in the house, or our cell phones whom we bow down to constantly.

You know, today is my anniversary, 23 years ago Stacy and I were married. One of the most nefarious and hurtful things in our relationship has just come up recently, it is my cell phone. How many of you are home and you are on your cell phone constantly? How many of you? We tried very briefly that when we got home we put the ringer on loud and put my cell phone on the bookshelf. I don't need to check the news, the sports, or facebook every waking hour. This isn't a slam against these newfangled technologies that are tearing the family apart, no, it is a slam on me and I would guess our inability to be strong enough to focus upon our relationships at home. So I am changing my clothes by making sure that every time that I am home the phone goes on the shelf. We may not have idols but we do have that which takes us away from God and from our loved ones. This is the first step.

The second step is that Jacob tells everyone to purify themselves once the gods have been handed over. There was only one way to do that in the Jewish culture, so for those who read Genesis generation after generation this translated into a ritual purification. They would take ritual baths called miqveh's which would be a total immersion and then rise up clean and pure not only physically but here even spiritually.

Our miqveh, our bath takes place in the blood of the Jesus Christ. Once we have eliminated the idols and sin in our lives then the infusion of the Holy Spirit takes over for the void left by our previous sin. The time we used to spend to get away from the family is filled with family activity centered around the church activity or Scripture reading. The purifying of ourselves comes when we accept Jesus Christ into our lives and into our families and he washes us clean, forgives us with his blood and makes us ready for the next step.

The next step is a change of clothes. Now you've heard about the preacher who went to buy a suit but the one he wanted to buy didn't quite fit him just right. The sleeves were too long but he figured if he walked like this they would fit, the pants were too short, but if he hunched over they would be the right length, the waist was too tight but if he held his breath it worked out. As he walked out of the store two people saw him and said, he sure is all crooked, but doesn't his suit fit him well?

Brothers and sisters if it is time for a transition in our lives, and I believe it is, don't just change your clothes. Make sure you have renounced evil and the hold of sin upon your lives, make sure you have allowed the blood of Jesus to wash you clean because if you haven't, no matter what front you put on, no matter how you scrunch yourself up, no matter what suit you wear, inside you will still be all crooked.

My greatest concern today is that we put on our old clothes after we have purified ourselves, hypocrisy is an easy goal for all of us. The hypocritical suit can fit us all too well if we are not careful.

The community sees our clothes, our actions, our efforts in the community to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, house the homeless, provide for the poor. Our faith in Jesus Christ, this purity manifests itself in those clothes of righteousness that are glimpses of the Kingdom of God.

People are looking to change their clothes today. You have in your possession fresh brand new robes to offer them that have been washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. Do not keep this wardrobe to yourself, but share this new outfit so that others can come to know the savior and feel the family comfort them. Amen.