

**The Fourth Sunday of Easter**  
**April (28 &) 29, 2007**  
**Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke**

I know I'm not the only one who's done this: I have a load of laundry to do, I'm low on quarters, there's only one machine free, and I've got other things to do, so I dump everything into one machine, careful not to overfill it, I carefully measure the detergent to prevent a suds eruption, I select 'COLD WASH' because there are colors and I don't want them to run, and it doesn't matter because there's a new red shirt in that load and it bleeds into all of my t-shirts and socks. They're not pink—pink I could handle—they're *stained*. That's what red does. Red is my favorite color; it stains everything.

This lesson I learned in college, where the whole point of doing laundry was to have something relatively clean to wear to the party that weekend. The party, and there was always a party, was our feast of victory over another week that had stood between us and graduation. Unstained clothing was only one thing you needed for a party. You needed drinks—even a glass of water is better than nothing. You needed food—run out of chips and salsa and your party guests will run out the door. Finally, you needed music, party songs that everyone knew.

The Revelation of John, from which we derive our Second Readings this Easter, is a book full of party songs. We're probably more familiar with attempted predictions of the end of the world, or at the very least texts that are frightening, but Revelation is a book full of hope, and full of party songs. The party is the Feast of Victory for our God, and the songs are ones that everybody there seems to

know. Our Easter Canticle of Praise, “This is the Feast”, comes directly from the soundtrack to God’s party as described in Revelation. This party has the food and the endless supply of drinks, and everybody is there in unstained clothes.

They’ve used a rather curious laundering technique; they’ve washed their robes in the blood of the lamb to make them white. Blood is not a good bleaching agent. Red gets into everything. If a little red dye from a red shirt can stain your socks, lamb’s blood will ruin your clothing. This is no ordinary blood, though, and no ordinary party. The blood is from the host of the party, the lamb seated in the middle of the throne. This is the Lamb’s party.

A word about lambs and shepherds: A lamb is harmless. It eats vegetables, not people. It’s the kind of animal around which you can feel safe. This lamb, John tells us elsewhere, has suffered a mortal wound. It’s even less than harmless. Lambs, and sheep in general, need a shepherd—someone to lead them. Shepherd was a common metaphor for king in the ancient world. It was not always meant to be comforting. The rod and staff of a shepherd could be used to keep order among the sheep, to drive them where they did not want to go. A lamb is harmless. A shepherd is powerful and not to be challenged. Revelation unites these two images, saying, “The lamb in the middle of the throne shall shepherd them.” The shepherd is one of the sheep! The leader is one of us. Christ, the Lamb, is the shepherd. He is our God, yet he is someone whom we can approach, someone as gentle as a sheep. He makes us able to face him at his party.

The party guests got their clothes cleaned by washing them in the blood of Christ. Christ's blood is his life poured out for us, a life dedicated to healing, to breaking down the barriers that stand between people, to giving life and hope and peace to all those in need. When we wash in the blood of Christ we wash in healing, openness and peace. Christ's blood is his life poured out for us on the cross, the harrowing image of God giving up life and glory and power so that we need not be afraid. When we wash in the blood of Christ we wash in a God whom we can face without terror. Christ's blood is how God forgives our Sin; Sin killed Jesus, but in so doing it eliminated all of our Sin against God and killed itself. When we wash in the blood of Christ we wash in forgiveness.

Now that Christ has washed us in life and forgiveness we are presentable at Christ's party. Whereas the party in college was the feast of victory over another week between us and graduation, Christ's party is the Feast of Victory for our God over Sin and Death. The food and drinks and music don't run out because Sin and Death no longer exist. God has raised Christ out of Death and into Life. The Feast of Victory for our God, as described in Revelation, celebrates God transforming death into life for all of us. The blood of Christ has done all of this.

That blood, like red dye, stains everything. It soaks into our lives now. It looks like stains to the world, but it is bleaching us clean. The stains of Christ's blood are yucky. They're obvious. It's impossible to miss a big old blood stain on a white shirt, and it's impossible to miss someone living a Christian life. We look different. We waste part of our day off coming to a worship service where we sing

a bunch of songs that non-churchgoers don't know. We give up some of what we have in order to help other people. We give up to God all of who we are, dedicating our lives to God's work. That's not normally the way the world works. We stick out like a blood stain, and sometimes it gets difficult. If you've ever walked around in blood stained clothing, or clothes that got stained in the wash, or clothes that you accidentally spilled an entire plate of spaghetti on, you get a lot of odd looks. People stare. They notice. They wonder. They talk. It makes you self-conscious and uncomfortable. Being Christian can be difficult. Friends of Christ, it is through the blood of Christ and all the things that it symbolizes that we find ourselves spotless and presentable to God. We might look awful to the world, but we look beautiful to God.

Christ drenches us in the self-giving love which he always pours out for others. Christ immerses us in a raging flood of forgiveness and healing. That red gets into everything. It stains us now with the promise that God is with us. It stains us with the reminder that we are forgiven. It stains us with the promise of eternal life. This meal, this Holy Communion, is a meal for the blood stained. It is a precursor of the Feast of Victory for our God. It is a reassurance that we have an invitation to that never-ending party, and that while we stick out like a blood stain to the world, that blood makes us presentable to God. That red is unstoppable. Set the cycle as cold as you can; it will do no good. The blood of Christ stains everything, and it is our ticket to the Feast of Victory for our God. Amen