

**Sunday, May 10, 2026**

**Sermon: "God's Stain Remover"**

**1 Peter 3:13-22 NRSV**

Where we're heading in today's message: In the beginning, he was a freelance window cleaner, paid by the pane. Then a client asked him to clean a vacant property, one that was an absolute mess. From there, he started a company that will tidy up anything, no matter how repulsive.

His name is Ben Giles. Along with the members of his team, he can clean everything from crime scenes to industrial accidents. According to The Guardian, he has become an expert in removing evidence of spillages, collisions, protests, explosions, fires and floods. He is "a self-taught stain savant, a walking database of remedies."

Coffee spills. Easy.

Soot, smoke, grease and blood. Can do.

Roadkill. Check.

Overtured trash trucks. No problem.

A dead whale in a harbor. Been there, done that.

Giles often sends his trainees into filthy prison cells, where they learn good cleaning techniques. A person can learn a bit about everything in a prison, tackling stains from the outside in, to avoid spreading the mess. This is hard work, often done down on all fours, with workers moving slowly, inch by inch. In prison cleanups, students learn the Giles Method, which begins with an important first principle: "Everything in front of you is dirty. Everything behind you is clean."

Giles is a religious man, and his work has a spiritual dimension. "If a stain or a mess is repulsive enough," says The Guardian, "its removal is seen as a delivery of near-religious proportions."

Life was messy for the followers of Christ in Asia Minor, a region that is now Turkey. They had made a mess of their lives through malice, insincerity, envy and slander, so the apostle Peter wrote a letter assuring them that the stain of their sin could be removed. Jesus "bore our sins in his body on the cross," he said, "so that, having died to sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been

healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Peter wanted them to know that Jesus had taken their sins on himself and paid their penalty for all time.

Jesus is a stain savant, a walking database of remedies for sin. Peter goes on to say that Jesus "suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous" in order to bring us to God (3:18). When Jesus was nailed to the cross, everything in front of him was dirty. After his death, everything behind him was clean. He was a righteous man who sacrificed himself for unrighteous people, and his death continues to bring us forgiveness and new life. Jesus is God's stain remover.

So, what is the Jesus Method? We have learned about the Giles Method for cleaning, but what technique does Jesus use? Peter tells us that Jesus "was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (v. 18). In his death on the cross, Jesus let go of any earthly limitations and entered into a new life of spiritual power.

In this new life, Peter tells us that Jesus "went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey" (vv. 19-20). While we do not know exactly who these "spirits in prison" were, they were probably people or angels who had made a mess of their lives and the lives of others. They may have been spirits who led people astray in the time of Noah.

Peter makes a connection between Jesus and Noah because he remembers the story of the Great Flood. This story in Genesis is another example of divine stain removal, one in which God flooded the earth because "the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" (Genesis 6:11). Peter says that "God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight lives, were saved through water" (1 Peter 3:20). In this story of wiping away sin, only eight lives were spared: Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives.

Fortunately for us, God promised never again to use this ancient method of stain removal. Instead, God established the Jesus Method, one in which we are baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus. Once baptized, we become part of the body of Christ, the church. We die to sin and are raised to new life. Peter tells us that baptism is meant to remind us of the Great Flood. It is a washing that

saves us “not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (v. 21).

Like the people who received Peter’s letter, we know that our sins can make a mess of our lives. Some of them can cause extremely stubborn stains. In fact, says The Guardian, the stain metaphor is a good one for describing moral failings. We say that a person’s character is “stained” when they fail to find redemption or forgiveness. We say that they are “indelibly stained” if cleansing and new life seem to be impossible.

Thankfully, Jesus is the greatest of God’s stain removers, and he can handle any mess we make. No one remains stained if they seek the forgiveness of Jesus. No one can be indelibly stained in the eyes of our merciful Savior. Jesus has complete power over sin and death, since he “has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him” (v. 22).

When it comes to sin removal, Jesus is the most powerful of solvents.

The first step for any of us is to admit our sins and ask for forgiveness. We can do this with full confidence that Jesus removes the stain of sin by his sacrifice on the cross. None of us should ever despair, because in the world of stains, there is always a solution. Mildew can be treated with a bleaching agent. Lipstick on a collar can be removed by Vaseline and a grease solvent. And for human sinfulness, there is no better solution than faith in Jesus.

We should never be afraid to ask for forgiveness.

Once we have been forgiven, we can join our brothers and sisters in doing Christ’s work in the world. After all, Jesus forgives us so that we can do his work and act as his hands and feet. Be “eager to do what is good,” writes Peter, even if you “suffer for doing what is right” (vv. 13-14). Do not be “intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord” (vv. 14-15). Be ready to make a defense “for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect” (vv. 15-16). In a world of heartless power politics, it is more important than ever that we try to do good, resist intimidation, live with hope, and show gentleness and respect.

A Virginia man named Mac recently died at age 89. Over his lifetime, he provided well for his family as an electrical engineer, a computer scientist and an expert in software programming and database design. But he was always very humble about his abilities and contributions, and he was gracious to family members and friends. According to his daughter, he believed that “in life there are no mistakes, only lessons to be learned.” If you make a mess, you ask for forgiveness, and then you move forward with wisdom.

Mac was a faithful servant of Christ and the church. He served as an elder, deacon, and was the creator of “Fix-It Day,” which brought people together to do repairs around the church building. His wife says, “Mac loved his God, loved his church, and he always wanted to help people.” He renovated the homes of low-income neighbors, led an effort to provide immediate help to people in need, and supported a project that built affordable homes in the church parking lot. Mac was forgiven by Christ so that he could do Christ's work in the world.

Forgiveness is designed not just to make us feel better, but to restore order to the world. Forgiveness is a gift we receive so that we can be a gift to Jesus and to the people around us. In a book about his experience as a cleaner, Ben Giles writes: “I really think that my faith, and my amazing wife and kids, have been the stabilizing foundation that's got me through lots of what I have seen and experienced.” He quotes Genesis, saying, “For dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Between birth and death, we have an opportunity to be forgiven and to forgive others. To receive cleansing and then do the work of cleaning in the world. Giles has found that it is important to sweep, scrub and share solutions to various stains. As an expert cleaner, he has discovered that almost any mess can be corrected. For streaks of mud, let it dry, then scrape it. For oil paint, use turpentine. On spilled coffee, try soap and sunshine.

Yes, our messes can be corrected. For the stain of sin, we can apply the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Then we can allow him to work through us, to restore order to the world. Alleluia, Amen.