

“Ash Wednesday Psalm 51, Barabas Style”

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By Rebecca Enney

As soon as church was over Barabas went into the men’s room and looked in the mirror at his reflection. The cross of ash that Pastor Ed had placed on Barabas’s forehead looked more like a dirty smudge than a cross.

*“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”*

He spit on his finger and rubbed the smudge. “Hmmm . . .” thought Barabas. “Now it just looks like a smear instead of a smudge.” So he rubbed at it some more.

“Well, this isn’t working.” So Barabas squirted out some soap from the dispenser unto his fingers and tried more seriously to wash it.

*Blot out the stain of my sin.*

Then he kind of put his forehead into the sink and ran water on it and then he dried it off with some paper towels.

“Darn, I can still see some of the mark. I can’t get it all washed off.”

Barabas looked at himself in the mirror. “I guess that black mark represents my sinfulness. I know I can wash it off better at home before bed.” And then he thought about the ways a second grade boy can sin. He thought about the time he said that he had cleaned up the dog poop in the back yard, but he really hadn’t. And the time he did not finish his homework, but said he did . . . and the time he kind of ‘accidentally’ looked at the answer on someone else’s paper at school. These and many other sins came to Barabas mind. Sins known only to himself . . . and to God.

*For I recognize my shameful deeds.*

“I guess I’m just a sinner.” thought Barabas as he looked at the floor. “I try really hard to be good, but it doesn’t seem to last very long.” And he thought about how, even if he DOES wash this black mark off really good with soap and water tonight at home, how next year on Ash Wednesday he’ll just get another black mark and the year after that and the year after that. It was kind of depressing!

*Wash me and I will be whiter than snow.*

Unexpectedly the door to the men’s room opened and in walked Pastor Ed. Pastor Ed looked at the black marks still on Barabas’s forehead. Barabas pretended he had not been trying to remove the mark. He just looked in the mirror as if he was checking for any chin hairs, although he is only in second grade.

“You know,” said Pastor Ed. “There is a cross on your forehead.” “I know.” said Barabas.

“Oh, I don’t mean the one that you will wash off tonight before bed. I mean the one that was put there when you were baptized.”

*Child of God, you are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.*

*Remember my sins no more.*

THAT cross, the one we can't see, the one put there when we were baptized, reminds us that God loves us, even while we are sinners and that He will bring us into eternal life.

(sigh, smile) And Barabas knows that THAT is good news!      THE END