

## The Blood that Gives Access

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our text for today is from the book of Hebrews in the tenth chapter:

*Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart...<sup>1</sup>*

Make no mistake, the God of the Scriptures is dangerous. It is not safe for sinners to be in His presence. When the sons of Aaron drew near to the Lord and disobeyed His commands by offering unauthorized fire, God consumed them with fire of His own. When a man by the name of Uzzah disobeyed the Lord by putting out his hand to the Ark of the Covenant because the oxen stumbled, the anger of the Lord was kindled so that He stuck down Uzzah there beside the Ark. Even when Moses requested to see the glory of the Lord, God had to place Moses in the cleft of a rock and cover him with His hand; for the Lord Himself had declared,

*“...man shall not see me and live...”<sup>2</sup>*

Now it is true that in the presence of God there is fullness of joy – so says our Psalm today. But it is also true that the Lord our God is a jealous God and He can no less tolerate the presence of sin than awe would tolerate just a little bit of cancer in our bodies. All this is to say then that access to God is one thing, but safe access to Him is another.

The author of the book of Hebrews considers this truth in our text today by means of an allusion to a very important event in the Old Testament. You see, the book of Hebrews is the New Testament answer to the book of Leviticus. And despite it being a perennial stumbling block for many who try and read through the Bible from cover to cover, the book of Leviticus contains some of the most profound pictures of Christ in the entire Old Testament.

Standing in the middle of the Pentateuch, that is the five books of Moses, is the book Leviticus. And standing in the middle of the book of Leviticus is perhaps the most pivotal chapter in all of Moses' books. In that central chapter God gives directions to Moses on how to offer up the most important sacrifices in the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. As a temporary solution for sinners not having safe access to God, the Lord spoke to Moses saying,

*“Tell Aaron your brother not to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die. For*

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:19, 22a.

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 33:20.

*I will appear in the cloud over the mercy seat. But in this way Aaron shall come into the Holy Place...*<sup>3</sup>

Each year then, on only one day a year, following the extremely lengthy and grueling instructions given to Moses – instructions that are lengthier than at least four books in the New Testament – the High Priest would wash his body for purification and clothe himself in the priestly garments. Then, taking a censor full of incense and the blood of the sin offering, He would pass through the temple curtain and enter into the most Holy Place. And finally, having let the cloud of smoke from the incense cover the Mercy Seat, He would stand in the presence of God, and there make atonement for the sins of the people.

This special day was known as Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement. And as the pinnacle of the Old Testament sacrificial system, the Day of Atonement was the one day of the year in which God allowed safe access to His presence in the most Holy Place.

The author of the book of Hebrews understood the importance of safe access to God. More than that he also understood that the Day of Atonement was ultimately about entering into the place of God's presence not by the blood of beasts, as we will soon sing in our hymn, but by the blood of Jesus. As the apostle Paul confirmed elsewhere, the feasts, festivals, and sacrifices of the Old Testament were shadows of things to come, but the substance belonged to Christ.

For Christ Himself is the very Sacrifice for sin and the High Priest offering the sacrifice. He is not only the Animal on the altar being drained of its blood, but he is also the Priest, slaughtering the Animal and bringing the blood into the Holy Places to secure our safe access to God. As the author of Hebrews explains, in days past,

*“the priest stood at his service offering the same sacrifices that could never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins He sat down at the right hand of God... For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”*<sup>4</sup>

On the cross, our Lord Jesus Christ acted as High Priest and Sacrifice for the last true Day of Atonement. Blooded for the sins of the people He cried out with His dying breath,

*“It is finished”*<sup>5</sup> ... *And the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 16:2.

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 10:11-12, 14.

<sup>5</sup> John 19:30.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 27:51.

The way then to such a Holy Place where God dwells is not through any curtain in a temple made with human hands. It is not through the Law of Moses nor the observance of rites and customs. It is not achieved by living a holy life or through sheer power of will. The author of Hebrews tells us in plain words:

*We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, through a new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh.*<sup>7</sup>

The way to the Holy Places is through the flesh of Jesus. For He is the Living Curtain through which sinners gain safe access to God. As Christ Himself has said,

*“I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me...”*<sup>8</sup>

And while all of this may sound abstract or even complex, it is very real and it is actually quite simple. For the author of Hebrews describes our situation right here and right now in this sanctuary – a situation made possible by the bloodletting on Golgotha and the tearing of the curtain on the temple mount. For we are a privileged people for whom the barriers to God have been torn down. We are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation now given access to God through the blood of Jesus.

We are more privileged than even the High Priests of old. For our access to God is not limited to a once a year event, but as often as we come together to eat Christ’s Body and Drink His Blood – as often as two or three gather in His Name to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament – and as often as we come before Him with prayer and supplications. Here in this place, even now, we have full and safe access to God.

And since we have such confidence to enter this Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, through the new and living way of His flesh, and since we have a great High Priest over the house of God who intercedes on our behalf, the author of Hebrews takes a page from the apostle Paul, and outlines our priestly duties with the New Testament triad of faith, hope and love.

First, **let us draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith** – with bodies washed at the font with pure water and consciences sprinkled clean from all guilt and shame. Let us draw near not in the confidence of ourselves, but in the knowledge that Christ our High Priest goes before us all the way.

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:19-20.

<sup>8</sup> John 14:6.

Next, **let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering**, for the One who has promised safe access by His blood is indeed faithful and true. In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our prosperity, in the hour of our death, and in the Day of Judgment, Christ remains our Sacrifice and Priest. The Holy Spirit bears witness to His faithfulness saying,

*“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”<sup>9</sup>*

And finally, **let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works** – For we are Christ’s workmanship, built into Him who is our very life. And as Christ has joined us to Himself, being ever present in our time of need, let us also be there for others in their time of need,

*not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another all the more as the Day is dawning near.<sup>10</sup>*

It is true that the God of the Scriptures is dangerous. Yet, your comfort this Lenten season, and every day till our Lord’s return, is that the Day of Atonement is passed. The wrath of God has been quenched by the blood of Jesus. The curtain blocking the most Holy Place has been torn down and the Mercy Seat is now in clear view. Let not your hearts be troubled. Christ has made known to you the path of life, giving you safe access to the Father by His blood. Amen.

**And the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

Midweek Lent II

Hebrews 10:11-25, John 14:1-7, Psalm 16:1-11

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<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 8:12.

<sup>10</sup> Hebrews 10:25.