

The Day is Drawing Near
25th Sunday after Pentecost
18 November Anno Domini 2012

Hebrews 10:11-13

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can 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, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

Grace, peace and mercy from God our Father and our Lord Jesus the Christ, Amen!

What the priests of the temple offered daily can never take away sins. All the blood of beast, apart from the Blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, cannot bring forgiveness, life or salvation. With a single stroke of his pen, the writer of Hebrews puts an end to the Old Testament covenant and its sacrifices.

Sins are not something we can bargain with God over; they're not something we can make up for. They are an offense to God's holiness, an insult to His justice. Our sin crosses the line of God's commandments. We are exposed by God's law to be idolaters, blasphemers, those who despise God's Word, who dishonor their parents and other authorities, who kill, commit adultery, steal, lie, covet and so much more. We do these things by our own thoughts, words, and deeds. We do things that are forbidden and we don't do what is commanded.

If God were to act according to His divine justice, we would be banned from His presence forever. We have no inherent right to it. He is justified in damning us, in excluding us, in sentencing us to the "everlasting shame and condemnation" of which Daniel speaks in the OT lesson. But He has promised not to do that, and the sole basis of one thing, a unique one-time sacrifice of Jesus who offered His life on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world and that includes yours and mine.

We are a modern day people. Our religion is not backwards and primitive. We don't have priests slinging buckets of blood from the slit throats of goats and bulls. Can you even imagine coming to church covered in blood? That might draw some attention to our little congregation and make people wonder what was going on here. But we don't offer whole burnt offerings. We don't think in terms of blood and sacrifice and atonement. The closest we come, perhaps, is to gaze upon a raised crucifix, or to sip from a chalice and acknowledge that we are drinking the blood of Christ which the world sees as nothing more than a cup of wine.

We are a modest, modern and western minded people. What the writer to the Hebrews is speaking of hardly crosses our religious radar screens. Priests once offered sacrificial blood for sins. It went on every day in the temple of Jerusalem. It would still be going on today if the temple had not been destroyed as Jesus Himself predicted it.

And yet modern, though we are; we have a sense, an internal notion that something is deeply wrong. It is not well within our souls. There is restlessness, uneasiness, even a panic. You can see it in those apocalyptic movies and all the things that push the end times anxieties. 12 years ago we experienced the Y2K notion, that uncomfortable notion that maybe the world actually was going to end that year. Many churches actually held New Year's Eve service, just to provide a place to park some of people's anxiety.

Now, in our day are looking at the end of 2012. There's a movie out about that. It turns out that the Mayan calendar runs out of steam in the December of 2012, and since there aren't any Mayans to consult as to why, people are thinking that perhaps the world will end in 2012 and the Mayans were somehow in on the big secret that no man can know. Of course, that's like suggesting that because LSB lists the dates of Easter out to

2050, should we believe that the world will end sometime before Easter 2051? The truth of the matter is that the editors of the hymnal figured the book would fall apart or be replaced long before then.

Perhaps you experience a little eschatological anxiety when you say those words at the end of the creed, ***“and He will come to judge the living and the dead.”*** And you should feel a bit of that eschatological anxiety, if not a twinge of fear and dread, because to stand before the judgment seat of God is a terrifying thing, if not for Christ, it would be a damning and destructive thing. I think many Christians seem to forget that, and think only in terms of how nice it will be when Jesus appears. “Nice” hardly is the word I’d use to describe it. Glorious, yes! Awesome, absolutely! Yes, there will be acquittal, forgiveness, salvation for all who believe, but those are always in the face of your sins, and it is always frightful to fall into the hands of God. If it’s that way for the justified, how much worse for those who refuse to be justified, to be saved.

But we approach that Day with confidence, hope, and expectation, mixed with fear, as the baptized believing people of God. Our hearts have been sprinkled by the Word of God, applying the blood of the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. Our bodies have been washed with pure, living water, the re-creative waters of Baptism. You have been washed, like a priest before his service, like a bride before her wedding. You are a priest in Christ’s royal priesthood. Your life as a Christian is a “priesthood,” offering spiritual sacrifices to God in thanksgiving for saving you and the world through the sacrificial blood of Jesus. You are priests offering your bodies as living sacrifices, not for sin but for gratitude and praise.

The writer to the Hebrews has given us three ***“let us”*** exhortations, three results of the fact that Christ has died one time for all time to atone for sin, that He died our death and was raised to life triumphant and now, even now as we speak, He is seated on His throne in the full array of our humanity, to exercise His lordship over death and life and all things. Three results, three end-times exhortations for you and me as we live out our lives anticipating the end:

First, ***“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”*** We have confidence. You know how you generally don’t boldly go where no man has gone before? You step cautiously, carefully with great care. We generally tiptoe where no man has gone before. Christ has gone before us. He has entered the holy place of heaven itself through the curtain of His own flesh. His death on the cross opens the kingdom of heaven as surely as the curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom the very moment that Jesus cried ***“It is finished.”*** Hear that. Understand that. Believe that. We are approaching the throne of the King of kings as a throne of grace, a place of promised mercy. We are coming to a Judge who was judged for us. And that means confidence. We are not boldly going where no man has gone before when we approach death, the grave, and the final judgment. We are going where Christ has gone before us, and we are going joined to Him.

Second, ***“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”*** We are banking on a promise. We are trusting, by the sheer mercy and grace of God, that when this life is over, when this age is over, when the last Day finally comes, we will be numbered among those who come to everlasting life, who as Daniel depicted it, would shine like the brightness of the heavens. We believe that not because we are good, religious, holy, pious, or even Lutheran. But solely on account of the Blood of Jesus shed on the cross, sprinkled by the Word on your heart, poured on you with the water of Baptism. That’s our confession.

This age, in which we live, views confessionalism as unfashionable, restrictive, even “unspiritual”, to believe something all together, corporately, and to say it all together. It’s supposed to be personal, private, and individual. The Creed forces us to be corporate. Our hymns force us to sing together, not as many following one lead singer, but all together as one voice, singing what the Spirit has taught us by the Word. The devil, the unbelieving world, your own flesh would have you question, try to get you to question your faith, dare you not

to believe that you are justified for Jesus' sake. But Christ didn't hang on a cross for you to be uncertain, wobbly, or be a weak-kneed Christian. You are baptized into Christ. Cling to Him and to the confession of His name. He's all you've got, and He's all you need to get you through. He is faithful.

Third, *“Let us stir one another up to love and to good works.”* Interestingly, this is one of the few places in the NT that speaks to church attendance – *“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.”* Even then, for whatever reason, there were those who stopped going to church. And Hebrews reminds each of you that there are corporate reasons for going to church. It's not just about you. Yes, we speak of receiving the gifts of Christ, of hearing the Word, of receiving the Body and the Blood, of prayer, praise and thanksgiving, and that is all good, right and salutary. But Hebrews would turn your eyes not to yourselves but to the person next to you and behind you and in front of you, and remind you that your presence here together encourages one another to love and to good works. When you are absent from church, you are saying to God, “your gifts mean nothing to me today,” but you are also saying to each other, “you mean nothing to me today.” When one member is missing, the whole body suffers, just as a hand missing one finger suffers, but it is the finger and not the hand that dies.

The Day is surely drawing near. Let us approach the God's throne of grace with confidence, clothed in our Baptism. The Day is surely drawing near. Let us hold fast to the confession of Christ who is our hope. The Day is surely drawing near. Let us get together around the gifts of Christ to stir each other up to love and good works.

Listen to the words of our Hymn once again.

O Jesus Christ, do not delay,
But hasten our salvation;
We often tremble on our way
In fear and tribulation
O hear and grant our fervent plea;
Come, mighty judge, and set us free
From death and every evil. (LSB #508)

Let us pray. Come Lord Jesus come, come quickly. Fortify our hearts and minds in faith and in fervent love for one another until you bring us safely home. In the Jesus Holy Name, amen and amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN.