

6 April 2023
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Bloody Place for Bloody Christians”

Text: Matthew 26:17-30; Hebrews 9:11-22; Exodus 24:3-11

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

It was bloody. Very bloody. The Old Testament Tabernacle and later the Temple. They were not clean and sanitary places, like our churches and homes. Because they were places of sacrifice. Animals were slain there - bulls, goats, calves, lambs, and more. And their blood was poured out, splashed, sprinkled, thrown against, and wiped upon people and things. And it was important to do so because, as we heard tonight, ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins***. So even more than places of sacrifice, the Tabernacle and the Temple *were places of forgiveness*. They were the place where God and man were reconciled. Where the sin which separates us from God now, and which threatens to separate us from God eternally, is taken away.

It *should* be our blood, of course, not the blood of animals that is shed. For we are the sinners. We are the ones who have rebelled against God and so deserve to die. But from the beginning, from the very first sin, God has provided substitutes, animals, to shed their blood and die in place of man. Not that God doesn't love animals, He does. They are part of His good creation. But He loves man more. He loves you more. Because you are not just another kind of animal, as some today would say, but a man, a woman, made in His image. And so God's love for you is more than His love for the animals. He would sacrifice them to save you.

And so it was in the Tabernacle and the Temple. Bloody places. So bloody, in fact, that the Brook Kidron was said to “run red” at the Passover, from all the blood of all the lambs that were sacrificed on that day each year.

But as we sing in one of our hymns,

*Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain* (LSB #431 v. 1).

Something more was needed.

On Mt. Sinai, as we heard tonight, ***the blood of the covenant*** was poured out, and ***the chief men of the people of Israel beheld God, and ate and drank*** in His presence. But it did not last. For again, and soon, there would be sin. Defiling sin. Rebellious sin. And so sacrifices again and again. More blood. Always more blood. Never-ending blood.

*Unless . . . Unless instead of more and more blood, there was a different kind of blood. A greater blood. A blood that would cleanse not just outwardly, but inwardly. Not just the flesh, but the conscience. Not just for a time, but for eternity. And not just in one place, wherever the Tabernacle or Temple was, but in all times and places. That instead of the people going to the Temple, the Temple go to the people. And forgiveness fill the world. A new covenant, to do what the *old* covenant could not.*

And so on this night, Jesus gathers His disciples - just as God had gathered the chief men of the people of Israel on Mt. Sinai - Jesus gathers His disciples together. And as on Mt. Sinai, they behold God, and eat and drink in His presence. But it is not the blood of an animal this night that will be shed and poured out, but the blood of God. And it will be no ordinary food and drink that they receive, but the very Body and Blood of God. A greater blood, for a greater cleansing. And they eat and drink not just *in the presence* of God, but they eat and drink the very Body and Blood of *God Himself*. The God who is also the Lamb who sheds His blood for them. So their defilement be cleansed, their separation overcome. What God had joined together and sin had separated God now joins together again.

For that's what forgiveness is. It is not just getting away with sin, which I fear is how we often think of it. It is the overcoming of sin. Forgiveness is not just God saying, "*Ah, it's alright. Don't worry about it!*" Forgiveness is God taking your sin and putting it onto the Lamb of God, His Son, Jesus, and Him shedding His blood for you, in your place. For ***without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin***. Forgiveness is bloody. It must be so.

But then forgiveness must also be applied to you. *You have to get bloody*, too. There is no other way.

So when you are **baptized**, it is the blood of *new* covenant that is poured out on you in the water for the forgiveness of your sins. When you are **absolved**, it is the blood of the *new* covenant that is sprinkled on you in those words for the forgiveness of your sins. But tonight, we especially remember that the blood of the covenant is also poured *into* you, given you to drink, for the forgiveness of your sins. And so not only were the Tabernacle and Temple bloody places, so is the Church. Here, too, there is blood everywhere - it is just hidden to our eyes in the water, the words, and the bread and wine. But it is here. Seen by the eyes of faith. Because if it is not here, what we're doing here is just playing, pretending. But Jesus and His blood are indeed here for you, for the forgiveness of your sins. To cleanse you, sanctify you, purify you, that you be reconciled to God. United to

Him again.

And so with these three days of the Sacred Triduum - Holy Thursday, Holy and Good Friday, and Holy Saturday - the old covenant is fulfilled and the new covenant is inaugurated. No more old Passover lambs, for there is now one, new, and greater Passover Lamb. No more going to the Temple of God, for the Temple of God comes to us in the flesh and blood of Jesus. No more shedding of blood, for this blood is all we need. The blood of Jesus, the blood of God, for the life of the world. And as we eat His Body and drink His Blood, the past, present, and future all come together in this place. The past as we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes, the present as we receive here and now His Body and Blood and forgiveness, and the future as we look forward to His coming again and the feast that has no end. So here is Mt. Sinai, here is the mount called Golgotha, and here is Mt. Zion. For here is the Jesus, *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29).

So it was also that night in the upper room where Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples. Did they understand all that that night? Likely not. But they did later. When Jesus opened their minds to understand, and when the Holy Spirit was poured out on them. The same Holy Spirit poured out on us, that we, too, might understand. And not only understand, but believe. And believing, rejoice. For this is a bloody place! Bloody with the blood of God. And there is simply no better place to be.

So as the chief men of Israel beheld God and ate and drank in His presence on Mt. Sinai, and as the disciples beheld God and ate and drank His Supper in the upper room, so let us now behold God here for us, and eat and drink His Body and Blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant, and rejoice in being bloody Christians, in this bloody place, with our bloody Saviour.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.