

2014_04_20 Resurrection
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:

9 – THE BLOOD THAT LIVES

Hebrews 13:20-21

INI

Grace and peace to you from Him who has made purification for our sins and has sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high. Amen.

Throughout the Passion season we've been considering a series of texts from the book of Hebrews. Each text has dealt with the significance of Christ's blood in His work as our High Priest. We have seen how the sacrifice of Christ has achieved complete atonement for sin and how as our High Priest He mediates forgiveness and holiness to us by His blood.

Today we come to the last in our series, from the final chapter of Hebrews,

Hebrews 13:20–21

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We pray, **Lord, sanctify us by Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.**

The Blood That Lives

- 1) In the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus
- 2) In the everlasting covenant bestowed through Word and Sacrament
- 3) In us who hear and believe

A Lutheran pastor was invited to preach at a church in India. The small Lutheran congregation was located in Malaysia and the subject he was asked to address in his sermon was the Lord's Supper. He preached a sermon on the cleansing power of Christ's blood. The atmosphere was electric and the congregation hung on his every word.

Afterward, however was when the real miracle was realized. The guest preacher was greeting the parishioners as they were being ushered out when a woman took his hand. She seemed unable to restrain her gratitude. She thanked the preacher profusely and as she left, she had a smile on her face.

The congregation's pastor was ecstatic. He pulled the preacher aside later and said, "Something wonderful has happened! That is the first time I've ever seen a smile on her face. Not just that, but that is also the first time since her confirmation that she has come to communion."

What happened, indeed? You see, this woman had been abused at a young age. And in this society, to be abused in that way meant she was basically outcast. It left her with no hope of marrying now. She would come to church dressed in black, sit in the back, and she never came to communion – that was, of course, until today. Today something had changed and it really was a miracle. Today she smiled.

What was it that happened that day?

We really should know the answer. And the answer is in the living blood; but not just the blood – the cleansing and life-giving power of Christ's blood is meaningless if it cannot be accessed; and how is it accessed if it is not heard; and how is it heard if it is not preached – so then "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). It was the blood of the everlasting covenant which resurrected that woman in Malaysia.

Today we will consider how the blood of Christ lives, and we will do so in three ways; three which are ultimately one: the blood lives 1) in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead; 2) in the everlasting covenant bestowed in Word and Sacrament; and 3) in us who hear the word and believe.

May the Spirit bless our meditation. Amen.

1. In the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus

Blood is life. Ask any surgeon. A surgeon will tell you his worst enemy is time. That is because loss of blood means loss of life. Time is of the essence and He must have more blood. He calls for the nurse to bring more. More is needed now. Without it, this patient will die.

Ultimately, we are dying. For many it is a slow process, and we often don't even think of it; but we are dying. Sickness, chronic illness, diseases – these are all symptoms of a greater reality: death has invaded this creation and is within each of us.

There is something deteriorating within us that causes a woman to weak black and sit in back. And it cannot explained in medical terms. We might cover it up – in the many goals we achieve for ourselves; in the business of life which keeps us distracted; in a sort of happiness we find on earth – yet despite the illusion the world might create, we are lacking. We are incomplete, temporal, and there is something behind it all that is deteriorating and dying.

At one moment it shows itself as pride: we refuse to admit a we're wrong, we build up excuses why she had no right to do what she did and I had every right to say what I said; then it appears again as lust: we indulge our sinful desires by rationalizing the fact that everyone is doing it; at another moment it reveals itself as egotism: we push through whom ever and what ever is in the way to what we want. And at another moment it is fear, sorrow, guilt: we find ourselves like that woman in Malasia, dressed in black, sitting in back row, supposing there is no hope for the future. Death has invaded this creation.

God has seen how incomplete we are. He sees right through all the cover ups to view the deterioration within

He calls for blood. He knows time is of the essence and He Himself will offer what is needed. He Himself will provide a donation of holy blood shed for us. He sends His only begotten Son as Shepherd to His people. As a Shepherd who cares for each of His sheep, who does everything to protect them and meet their needs, Jesus did everything to care for each of you and meet each of your needs. Yet, more than any earthly Shepherd, Jesus is the Shepherd who lay down His life for the sheep.

Mary has brought spices. Mary Magdalene is the first to get there and has come to anoint His dead body. She weeps and mourns; He whom she loved so dearly is dead. Death has invaded her life and with slow steps she approaches the tomb.

However, day is just beginning to dawn, and a light illumines the dark tomb. An angel sits near an open tomb and His words shine with words of life: "He is not here. Go tell His disciples." Life is awoken within her; an awe and joy which carries their feet as they return. Quickly their sandals move down the garden path. They run with haste until their feet are stopped. With a word of greeting, He stops them. This Man whom they saw buried with their own eyes, now stands before them alive. This Man who just

48 hours ago was bleeding, dying, as pale as a ghost, now is filled with a blood which lives; a blood which is glorified; a blood which speaks: "Do not be afraid."

"Your right hand, O Lord, has dashed the enemy in pieces." The God of peace has brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead. He has made good on His agreement and time ceases to be an issue. This is an everlasting agreement where He does it all; He offers the sacrifice for your sins, He makes you complete in every way; the resurrection seals this covenant in a blood which cleanses you from all sin. Life now invades this creation and His blood restores life for all who believe. The blood lives in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead.

2. In the everlasting covenant bestowed through Word and Sacrament

A surgeon recognizes the great importance of blood. Especially when someone in surgery is bleeding. He calls for more, now. The nurse rushes to the refrigerator for more. Will it be there? She must find some. If not, this patient will die.

Martin Luther explains the third article of the Apostle's Creed this way:

"The work is finished and completed, Christ has acquired and won the treasure for us by his sufferings, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained hidden and no one knew of it, it would have been all in vain, all lost. In order that this treasure might not be buried but put to use and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to be published and proclaimed, in which he has given the Holy Spirit to offer and apply to us this treasure of salvation."

The blood of the everlasting covenant lives in the resurrection, and is given in the proclamation of the gospel.

The benefits of the resurrection are meaningless if they are not believed. What good is blood to the surgeon, if there is no access to it? So then "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ."

So the angel sits and speaks. The woman goes to tell. Christ stands and greets. Peter opens His mouth and proclaims. And Paul writes in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you — unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of

all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

The Word proclaims the covenant and we are saved. Week after week we stand in the grace of His resurrection. Week after week, as we confront an evil and hostile world; as we battle a sinful flesh; as we are abused by the works of Satan, this covenant keeps our life from turning black; it keeps us from losing hope or having an uncertain future.

So we find it, week after week, sprinkled throughout our liturgy: in a baptism by water, in a word of absolution, in the response of a psalm, in a Scripture read, in a sermon preached. And it culminates in the tasting of this resurrection – a feast of victory where the living Christ sprinkling our hearts with His living blood and says: “Take and drink, this is My blood of the eternal covenant which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

The word, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper, give us access to God’s everlasting covenant, His living blood, and His resurrection.

3. In us

The surgeon has called for more and more has been given. Time is of the essence and God knows it. God knows it so He does not offer a temporary fix; he does not merely sow a few stitches; He gives us new hearts and fills us with eternal life. The blood which lives in the resurrection, in the Word proclaimed, now lives in you.

20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The phrase “through the blood of the everlasting covenant” modifies the central verb of our text. And that central action is this: “God is making you complete in every good work.” Through the blood of the everlasting covenant, God makes you complete. That is to say, the blood once given for you, now lives in you.

God has called for life and life has been given. He has done it all. He has raised up our Lord Jesus, He has conveyed a covenant in word and sacrament. He has entered our ears and mouths and touched our hearts that we might live.

Salvation is complete and perfect. And by that proclamation, God resuscitates what was dead, raising up good works and love in our life. Our response then, does nothing more than acknowledges what God has done in Christ: that He has freed us from our sin; that He has forgiven us; that He makes us complete. Christ is now in you, "You who once were dead in trespasses have been made alive together with Him, for by grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Complete in Him. It is an everlasting promise. It does not mean the struggle is over, but more so that the struggle is overcome. That is to say, our faith and works have as their goal, something complete and eternal: a restoration of all things on the last day. We live not for today, but for eternity. And as we serve our neighbor, we recognize in ourselves these works will be complete; but in Christ, all things are perfected and will be complete on the last day: for we know that "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, our sinful flesh will be forever dashed under foot, and our bodies will be raised incorruptible" (1 Corinthians 15:46 This is the blood which lives in us forever.

What happened, indeed? It was really a miracle. Today she smiled. A woman, once abused and outcast, once always dressed in black, came to communion. And she has since gone on to resume an active Christian life. She has since married, had a child, and comes to communion regularly. Something wonderful has happened.

We do know the answer. The answer is in the blood; for this blood lives in our Lord's resurrection, is conveyed through the Word, and is received in hearts that believe. Today we can smile; we can dress our lives in glorious white robes, cleansed with His blood; we can run with Mary; open our mouths with Peter; and proclaim together with all the saints: "I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously!"

Amen!