

2014_03_19 Midweek Passion 3
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:
3 – THE BLOOD THAT GIVES ACCESS
Hebrews 10:19-22
INI

Grace to you from Him who is our Great High Priest, who mediates a New Covenant in His own blood, and peace to you in His blood, the blood which cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 1:1–2) Amen.

The third in our series of texts dealing with the blood of Christ in the book of Hebrews comes from

Hebrews 10:19–22

¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and having a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

1. Restricted or open access to people and places

Raise your hand if you have direct access to the president. Few people have unrestricted access to the president. Most people don't even have limited access. The closest you and I can come to the president is perhaps to write a letter. Even the members of his own cabinet do not have the privilege to just walk in to the oval office whenever they want. Really, the only people that have unrestricted access to the president are: the chief of staff, and the president's personal aide. They oversee his schedule, and, each day, they decide who gets to see him and who does not. The office of president is guarded by varying degrees of access.

Tonight we look at worship and faith in terms of access. Access to God's presence. Who has access? And even more so, who has unrestricted access? How and to whom is such a privilege granted? The idea is the central thought of our text. It is embedded in the vocabulary of verse 19.

Take a look at verse 19. Most translations will say something like this: “Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence / boldness to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near...” However this translation, “boldness,” comes up a little short of the sense I believe is being conveyed.

The word used here for “boldness” comes from a Greek word having to do with the political arena. In Greco-Roman world of the 1st century, this word had to do with “the right to speak” in the public assembly. The only way you would be granted such a right was if you were a citizen. It is similar to how we use the phrase “right to vote.” Similarly, the word was also used to refer to the right or freedom to speak to a public official. In this sense, the word could be used to refer to the right of access to a public officer. In terms of the president, this refers to the privilege that only the chief of staff and president’s personal aid can grant – the “right of access” to the president.

It is an objective thought. Either you are authorized or you are not. It is freely given to some, restricted for others, or might be withheld altogether. It is not only confidence, but a privileged right. Indeed it should make us bold and encourage us to enter freely as v.22 says. But it begins with a “right of access...” And it has to do with access to the highest official – God Himself.

Hence, verse 19 – “Therefore brethren, having the privilege of access” or “the right to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus” ... “let us draw near;” that is, “let us approach God’s holy presence in full assurance of faith.”

2. Limited access to God’s dangerous presence

Under the Old Covenant, God’s presence was dangerous. God is holy. And what that means is that nothing sinful or unclean or unholy can exist in His unrestricted presence. As such, access was always limited. Access was granted in a way that would protect the people from coming into His presence improperly. For instance, if you were unclean, then you were unauthorized to approach God’s presence in the worship rituals. Perhaps you came into contact with a dead body; or you contracted some bodily disease. To protect His people from harm, God prescribed limited means of accessing His holiness and sharing in His blessings. Access to God’s presence in worship under the Old Covenant was restricted.

Imagine yourself with me once again, that special day where High Priest entered the Most Holy Place. Allusion is made in our text. It is the day of atonement – the one day when the high priest was privileged with go behind the veil and access God’s most holy presence in the tabernacle. But it was never without blood.

You help with the preparations as the high priest dons his white robe. There must be blood. God has sanctified blood as the means by which He will atone for the sins of the people. You help with the slaughter of the goat and the blood is given to the High Priest. He walks purposefully into the tent. The priests are normally never allowed to enter the "Most Holy Place." But today is the day of atonement. Today the High Priest will go through the curtain. There he will sprinkle the blood to meet with God and atone for the sins of the people.

It is pitch black behind the curtain. He counts His steps. One, two three, four. Seven times he sprinkles the floor; seven times the place of atonement upon the ark. You see him come out and a bit of a collect sigh is heard among the people. Everyone seems to recognize what this means. God has accepted the offering and forgiven His people.

Yet what is a privilege for some is also a warning to others. Only through the sanctified means that God has given can we enter His holiness. It was through the priest; and it was with blood. Those who try to worship God apart from what He has authorized, bring judgment upon themselves. People in the Old Testament actually died for desecrating God's holiness.

To approach God apart from the means He has granted is a dangerous thing. For each of us – sin is very real and ever present in our lives. It makes us spiritually unclean day by day. And this is not mere bodily uncleanness like in the first covenant. The sins that make us unclean are those which proceed out of the heart. It stains us with inner thoughts that we know cannot exist in the presence of a holy God. It is an uncleanness that impacts our interaction with each other. We are stained with frustration: when mom keeps trying to tell me what to do. We are stained with resentment: when a child continually does the opposite of what I ask. We are stained with a bitter attitude: when those who should be nearest to us seem to walk all over us. Out of our heart comes this uncleanness: bitterness, resentment, judgmental righteousness, discontentment, and so on. We are stained with sin without and within.

For this reason, God sanctified a covenant. That is to say, He has made a holy agreement through which His people might access His presence. He sanctified the Old Covenant, granting a limited access: Through the tabernacle, blood, and the high priest, the people had access to the most holy place and God's holy presence. And now that Christ, the fulfillment of the priesthood has come, God has sanctified a new and living way. God has made a holy agreement with us – the New Covenant. There is way through which we, stained sinners, have the privilege of entrance: in an unrestricted

spiritual way, each of us is privileged to approach the most holy place. For we have a High Priest over the dwelling place of God.

3. Safe access to God's gracious presence

We've spoken of access in a political way. What about in a personal sense?

Certain people might have limited access to me. In my office as pastor for instance: members, colleges, fellow pastors, business associates – they all have a sort of limited access to me as pastor. They can email, call, stop by my office. However none of them has unrestricted personal access. None of them has a key to my house. Only my family is authorized to my enter that most intimate and personal of places: my home.

The home is the place where we keep what is most precious and personal to us. For me, I have one wife, and three children (soon to be four). These are the people who have this personal access to me and vice versa. They can reach me whenever they want; they can come and go in the house as they please; what is mine is theirs. As a father, my children should be free to approach me without being afraid or worried. As a husband, my wife even more so has unrestricted access – to reach me whenever she needs me, to ask me questions or tell me when something is bothering her. These are the people who have access to me personally.

God, as our heavenly Father, has granted such access. Here, in His home, a place where we are authorized to approach Him without fear or restriction. This is what it means to be called children of God; this is what it means to worship Him in full assurance of faith. You have access to God in the most intimate and personal of ways. We have a “the right of entry” – we are authorized to enter the “Most Holy Place.” God has now grant safe access into His gracious presence and glory.

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Worship and faith are all about access. And now that Christ has come as High Priest of good things, we have a new and living way; we have unrestricted access to the Most Holy Place.

Notice the elements of worship are the same: the sanctuary, the blood, the way (that is, the curtain), the washing, and the sprinkling. We enter the Holiest by the blood, through the veil, and have confidence by washing of water and sprinkling of blood.

The Sanctuary is called the Most Holy Place. And what is the most holy place? What is the place of worship under the New Covenant? Not an earthly temple, but a heavenly temple. And heaven is simply the place where God dwells. Where ever God is, that is heaven.

The blood is not of goat and calves, but it is the precious blood of Christ. As Peter writes, "a lamb without blemish or spot." This is the blood which is now sprinkled before God and which cleanses us from all sin.

The way is not the curtain of the tabernacle, but the flesh of Christ. Under the Old Covenant, the veil was very thick, with a part down the middle. You literally had to go through it to get into the most holy place. Now the way into the most holy place is the flesh of Jesus. He became flesh that He might bring us to God. But unlike goats and calves, this is not a corpse. It is a new and living way. That is to say, Jesus lives. His sacrifice was once for all and because He has risen and ascended, he now is able to make intercession between us and God. As Paul confirms, His body is the Church, which means that where the Church gathers on earth, the Church gathers in heaven, and through His body we enter the most holy place.

The body and blood of Jesus has granted us the right of access. The place is the heavenly sanctuary where God dwells, the means is the body and blood of Jesus, and the manner which is worthy is by faith. And not just by faith, but by full confidence of faith. We approach in full assurance of faith knowing Christ has provided eternal redemption and it is ours.

But how do we know for sure? Yet even if we know Jesus has accomplished all this, how do we truly know it is ours? We look at lives filled with sin and uncleanness. We look within and find the stain of sin has left its indelible mark. How can you be sure that this right of entry belongs personally to you?

You are assured because 1) you have been washed with pure water and 2) your heart has been sprinkled from a guilty conscience. That is to say, 1) you have been baptized, and 2) you have received His blood in the proclaimed gospel and in the Lord's Supper. Washing was always preparatory for entrance to the tabernacle. Before you could come to offer the sacrifice, the priest would wash. Baptism washes you clean of the sin what resides in your old man, it drowns your sinful flesh, and prepares you for worship. It

prepares you for a life of service in God's presence. However, as time rolls on, you become plagued with guilt. And evil conscience prevents you from serving God in confidence. Sin tries again and again to gain a foothold in your life and Satan is ever the accuser. So Christ visits us again in His word, He sprinkling our hearts with His blood. Blood was always the means of atonement and forgiveness. And Jesus visits us in the most personal and intimate of ways: He offers His very body and blood in holy communion. He sprinkles your heart with His blood. In communion, God forgives your sins, cleanses your conscience, and gives you the assurance of faith: "My peace be with you always." Washing and sprinkling, baptism and the Lord's Supper are the sanctified means of the New Covenant. They grant the privilege of access directly to you.

It is an objective thought; through the proper means: blood, priest, sprinkling and washing – we have been given a right of entry. And our Father says, "you are welcome in my home – it is your right now as My children to come and go as you please, to serve me and receive My service to you, to ask me questions and search me for answers."

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Amen.