

2014_04_09 Midweek Passion 6
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

The Blood of Christ in the Book of Hebrews:
6 – THE BLOOD THAT MAKES US HOLY (SANCTIFIES)
Hebrews 13:9-16
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, a blood which cleanses us from all sin (Hebrews 1:1-2) Amen.

It began with the presentation of the lamb and concluded with the eating of the lamb. And it was through these sacrifices that God would meet with His people and through the priesthood, He would bless them. The priests are mediators of God's holiness and in this way the people are sanctified; their hearts are confirmed in faith by God's gracious acceptance of their worship. They are His holy people.

It began with the presentation of the lamb. The congregation gathers for the morning sacrifice. Those who have washed and are clean may enter the court yard. And this day a father, his son, and a widow have come to offer a peace offering. They have brought their own bread and their own lamb. The lamb is unblemished and freely given. Today, this family will share in fellowship and peace with God by eating of this blessed food in God's presence. The peace offering is the one sacrifice where the common Israelite would share in the eating of the sacrifice.

The sacrifice is presented and the Levitical choir sounds the trumpet. They sing a psalm and the people fall to their faces before God's presence. It is a song of praise, the fruit of the lips. The choir uses a psalm of thanksgiving to express the people's great thanks for God's forgiveness and for the privilege to share in His holiness. The people respond: "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

And it ends with the eating of the lamb. Today a father and his son will eat a sacred meal in God's presence. But they will not be alone. There is more here than a father and his son could possibly eat. This is a meal meant for fellowship; food meant to be share. Firstly, it will be shared with the priests on duty. It is their covenant privilege to share in the peace offering. It is their right to eat from the altar. Secondly, the father it will be shared in fellowship with this poor widow. The father has invited her to come and share.

But still, there is more than enough. And in such abundance, they will share. The father plans to take some of the left overs with him when he leaves. He knows a husband and wife who are living outside the camp. They are foreigners. And since they are foreigners, they have no property and are very poor. He will share what he can with them.

Thus the true purpose of the peace offering is expressed – to commune in God’s holy presence and to share His blessing with others. The father explains to his son that God is well pleased with such sacrifices.

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

Hebrews 13:9–16

⁹ Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.

¹⁰ We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. ¹¹ For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. ¹² Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. ¹³ Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. ¹⁴ For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. ¹⁵ Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. ¹⁶ But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

The Blood that Makes Us Holy (Sanctifies)

1) A Saint is Anyone Made Holy in the Blood of Christ

The word means “holy ones.” Yet when Webster’s dictionary defines the word “saint”, it becomes shaped and skewed by popular understanding. SAINT: “a person who is officially recognized by the Christian church as being very holy because of the way he or she lived.”

In no small thanks to the Roman Catholic Church, “sainthood” is commonly understood as a matter of human achievement. It is commonly defined in terms of exceptional virtue and sacrifice. And it is primarily restricted for those who are dead. So Mother Teresa is a saint because her life has been publicized in terms of virtue and

service toward others. A “saint” has become a title reserved, a goal to be met, something recognized only after having lived up to a moral standard. This popular understanding leaves most of us Christians a little less than holy, if at all. The term has come to refer primarily to the life of a dead super-Christian.

Yet, when Paul address the congregations he serves, what term does he use? He doesn't call them Christians. He addresses them either as “brothers” or as “hagioi” – that is, as “holy ones,” “saints.” This is not some higher caste of super-Christians. There is no Mother Teresa or Dali Lama. These are Corinthian Christians – a rather rough congregation: sailors, tradesmen, commoners, Gentiles, sinners. These are Lutheran Christians. He addresses you. He addresses me. The Spirit addresses any and all baptized believers as “holy ones.” As is written in 1 Corinthians 1,

1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.

To be sanctified is to be a saint. And to be a saint is to be a baptized believer. Holiness is some goal to be reached, but it is a gift given. These are not super-Christians, but these are everyday Christians: mothers, fathers, babies; these are fast-food workers, carpenters, and mechanics; these are stay at home moms and dads; these are the everyday callings in which we are called to be saints. A saint is anyone made holy in the blood of Christ Jesus.

2) We share in Christ's holiness

It begins and ends with Christ. It begins with the presentation of the Lamb and it ends with us eating from His altar. Rather than holiness having to do with an achievement gained, it is instead a a gift to be given. It is drawn from the one and only source of all holiness: God. Through the means He has established, He shares His holiness and sanctifies us to be His priests and to serve Him.

For “we have an altar from which those who serve in the tabernacle have no right to eat.” We have an altar that is not in Jerusalem. We have a priesthood that serves apart from the tabernacle services. No longer through the earthly temple or earthly foods will God meet with His people. But a new altar will be raised and it will be found outside the camp. It will be found in the place where where Christ is to be found.

On the day of Atonement, the body of the animal for sacrifice was to be burned outside the camp of Israel. So when Good Friday comes, where do we find Jesus? He is taken

outside of Jerusalem, forsaken, bearing the reproach of the cross. He is led to place of the skull by the hands of Roman Gentiles. It would be execution the Roman way: death by crucifixion. There, outside the camp, Jesus is forsaken – not only by His people, but also by God. The fulfillment of God’s day of Atonement happened when Jesus’ body was led outside the camp.

As our text says, “Jesus suffered outside the gate, so that He might sanctify the people with His own blood.” So we go outside the camp, and we eat of a different altar; Christ has fulfilled all that the first altar was representing and God has erected a new altar within a new covenant.

Jesus is the source of holiness. He is the Holy One, the Saint who truly defines the term; who reaches God’s holy standard in complete selflessness and faith toward God. He brings it from heaven to us by becoming flesh and blood; this means that His human blood is holy. And by faithfully serving God on our behalf, His death took on the redemptive power to destroy death and the devil and make atonement for our sins.

It began with the presentation of the lamb. The congregation gathers and those cleansed in the waters of baptism enters the courts of God by faith. It is through the sacrifice of Christ that God will meet with His people. And it is through His blood that God will make them holy.

The Lamb is presented in the hearing of the gospel and the absolution. Here His work of atonement is declared and we are forgiven. This confirms our faith in His grace and no longer are we carried about by strange teachings and works that have no profit. As saints, we do not seek any earthly source of holiness. Not in the city Jerusalem, not in pilgrimages or monasteries or some human definition of sainthood. Christ truly sanctifies us by His truth and His Word is truth, so that the waters of baptism make every believer a saint.

And the service concludes with eating and drinking in God’s holy presence. We partook this last Sunday – a sacred meal in God’s presence. As sanctified priests, we have a right to eat from this altar; we have been called to be priests and made holy by His blood. This is the altar of His sacrifice where we receive the holy body and blood of the Lamb who lives.

3) We serve as holy priests together with Christ

It is through this sacrifice that God meets with His people and likewise, through the priesthood that He offers His blessing. The priests were always mediators of God's holiness and His blessing. And as priests before God, this is where we come in.

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. 16 But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Praise always accompanied the daily sacrifices. The Levitical choir would sound the trumpet and a psalm would be sung. But praise was never spoken of in terms what we do for God; it was always in terms of what God does for us. For that reason, praise was not directed toward God, but toward the congregation and toward the world. Verse 15 could be better translated: "let us confess His name."

Praise is not for the good of God, but for the good of the our fellowship and for the good of the world. It includes every expression of our worship which makes His name known. So our whole liturgy is built around this idea. The sacrifice is presented and the choir of saints responds. The work of Christ is central to our worship and surrounding and adorning it are the songs of the saints – psalms and hymns and spiritual songs that express God's name and work of salvation. These are the fruit of lips which express thanks for God's forgiveness and for the privilege to share in His holiness. And so the name of God and His saving ways are made known to the world.

15 Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

It concluded with the eating of the lamb. And there is more than enough. This is a meal meant for sharing. There is such abundance, that we cannot help but share.

16 [Let us] not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

We leave with the Lord's blessing, we have participated in the peace offering in its purest meaning – to commune in God's holy presence and to share His blessing with others. That is 1) doing good in our callings and 2) sharing offerings in our weekly gatherings around the word.

As priests, we return to our callings that we might do good. The work of a priest is to mediate God's blessings. We receive it here as we gather in His holy presence, and we distribute it to our neighbor and the world in our callings. That is why sainthood should never be looked at as the calling of clergy. These sacrifice are made by everyday

Christians. As mothers, fathers, babies; as fast-food workers, carpenters, and mechanics; as stay at home moms and dads – these are most holy callings in which you do good for others. Let us not forget; for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

We also act as priests by sharing. The word for “sharing” is literally, “fellowship.” It encompasses the essence of the peace offering – to share in fellowship with each other and to reach out to the underprivileged. We collect an offering each Sunday as an expression of fellowship. We share in support of the ministry of the word here and throughout the CLC. With efforts like Project Kinship we welcome the widow and orphan to share in the peace offering. With a portion going to missions, we support the priesthood effort to spread the gospel to all nations – to those outside the camp. Let us not forget to share God’s blessings in fellowship; for with such sacrifices, God is well pleased.

A saint is not defined by popular thinking. It is not the life of a dead super-Christian. It is defined by Christ’s blood. A saint is anyone who has stood in the presence of God and partaken of the blood of His Son by faith; you are a saint by baptismal right and you are given the rights of the priesthood.

This is the blood which sanctifies us.

Amen.