

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Lent: April 2, 2017**  
**“The Perfect Sacrifice”**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is from Hebrews 9.

In this text, we have explained the perfection of the sacrifice of Christ. Christ is the perfect High Priest. Priests in the Old Testament had several very specific and very important tasks. They were set aside to keep the holy things of God holy. They were to do the actions of the ceremonial law. They were to teach, intercede for the people of God, and they were charged with conducting the sacrifices on their behalf. They served as mediators between God and man.

God desired to be with His people. They were common and enemies, due to sin, and God gave means by which they would be united with Him. In His Holy House, the tabernacle, and later the permanent structure of the temple, was God’s throne on earth. The tabernacle and the temple itself pointed forward to Jesus. Who He was to be and what His work must be. The elements of the temple, the various furnishings and actions to be conducted, also give us wisdom and insight into the person and work of Jesus. Our text this morning focuses on the specific work of sacrifice.

Sacrifice is defined as “the surrender or destruction of something prized or desirable for the sake of something considered as having a higher or more pressing claim.” In baseball, the sacrifice bunt is where the batter bunts the ball in a direction for the defense to easily throw him out, while a different runner can advance to another base and possibly score. In life, we are given a limited amount of time and resources. To do anything, really requires a sacrifice. We sacrifice our time to come to church. We sacrifice our time to work. We sacrifice our time to go on vacation. Parents sacrifice their time, their money, their food, and their resources to care for little people who cannot care for themselves. Parents and guardians sacrifice even more time not only to sustain their lives, but they also sacrifice and exhaust many of their own resources in efforts to raise and train that other person to likewise grow and do the same. Before every sacrifice, the same question is asked, at least implicitly, “Does the surrender of this time, resource, etc. serve a greater purpose?”

Consider the Old Testament teachings on sacrifices. From the beginning of creation, sacrifice was built into its very fabric. The Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, “was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.”<sup>1</sup>

God knew what was going to happen. He knew about the fall into sin. He knew about the sending of His Son to die, and He created the world anyways. Consider how difficult the first sacrifice must have been for both man and for God. God brought the animals to man, and man named each one of them. What happens when you name an animal? Does it remain an anonymous object of entertainment? No, you develop a relationship with it. Man was given the command by God to care for creation, to tend the garden, and now he names all the animals. Man was invested in this earth, and then due to his disobedience, all of creation was cursed. On top of that curse, God sacrificed animals and made garments for Adam and Eve from their skins. These poor creatures were stripped and used to cover the shame of man and woman. These coverings would not only cover their shame, but they would also serve as a harsh reminder of death which is the result of sin.

The sacrifice was not just about the death of the animal. God declared, “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”<sup>2</sup> The blood was given as an atonement, compensation, one life for another. The Law declared, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament sacrifices, blood was carefully separated from the animals. Each part of the animal had specific means, and in the blood was the life. The blood was used during the ordination of the priests to cleanse them, to set them apart. It was sprinkled on them to cover their sins and set them apart for the service of the Lord. It was placed on their right ear, as a reminder to hear and speak only the holy words of God. It was placed on their right thumb to cleanse and serve as a reminder of doing the holy works of the Lord. Blood was even put on their right big toe, to cleanse them to walk in the holy places. They were to speak, do, and

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter 1:20–21

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 9:22

<sup>3</sup> Leviticus 17:11

walk always in the ways of the Lord. Without the blood, nothing could be done on the altar, no one could eat in God's presence, no one could enter the holy place, and no blessing could be pronounced upon the Lord's people. The High Priest could only enter the Most Holy Place, where the Ark of the Covenant, God's throne, one day a year. He was to take some of the blood of the special sacrifice and in very specific ways apply it to the mercy seat and the horns of the altar to cover the rebelliousness of the people. It was only in these ways, could the people be assured of God's mercy.

These sacrifices pointed forward to the one all-sufficient sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the perfect High Priest who kept the law perfectly. He was anointed, that is set apart, to do very specific work. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."<sup>4</sup> Jesus was born without sin and lived His entire life never breaking the Law of God. He was perfect. Where Adam was created perfect and fell, Jesus was born perfect and did not fall. And what did this perfect man do? "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,"<sup>5</sup> and, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."<sup>6</sup> He lived the perfect life and died the death that we deserve.

Just as the High Priest took the blood into the Most Holy Place and brought some out to cleanse the altar, Jesus fulfills that in a most glorious way. He offered His own blood. He as a man rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. He entered into the heavenly sanctuary with His flesh and blood to be with His Father, "When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption."<sup>7</sup>

What is the effect of this perfect blood offered to God to redeem us, to purchase us from sin and death? "If the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled

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<sup>4</sup> Galatians 4:4–5

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3

<sup>6</sup> 1 John 2:2

<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 9:11–12

persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”<sup>8</sup> This sacrifice of Christ gives purity of the conscience. That is man is not bitten by the recollection of sins. Psalm 112, “He is not afraid of bad news; his heart is firm, trusting in the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> Why is this so?

Romans 2, “There will be tribulation and distress for every human being.”<sup>10</sup> A sin committed in the past cannot be changed, and the wrath against that sin cannot be avoided. One cannot escape thus being distressed and troubled, that is poor and miserable. The only way to be freed from these difficulties, to have a clear conscience, is through the blood of Christ.

In Holy Baptism, Jesus sprinkles us with His most holy blood. Through this blood he cleanses us on the outside in a way, pardoning our sins, and sets us apart as His holy people. He has redeemed us with His blood so that “I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.” In our various vocations we serve God by serving our neighbor as parent, child, sibling, citizen, leader, teacher, student, employer, employee, or whatever the case may be. In these various vocations, “since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”<sup>11</sup>

Why the gathering together, it is here through the Lord’s Supper the sacrifice of Jesus is given to us as we drink His blood, receive His forgiveness, His life. Through this blood He sprinkles us internally, in a way, to set us apart to serve in

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 9:13–14

<sup>9</sup> Psalm 112:7

<sup>10</sup> Romans 2:9

<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 10:19–25

the heavenly sanctuary with angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven praising God for the Lamb who was slain for us and has begun His reign. Here our shame is covered, our sins forgiven, and we “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”<sup>12</sup>

“Believing, we rejoice

To see the curse remove;

We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice

And sing His bleeding love.”<sup>13</sup> Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26

<sup>13</sup> LSB 431 Not All the Blood of Beasts: Stanza 5