

The Twenty-fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Psalm 16; Hebrews 10:11-25

Grace to you and peace from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

“Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin.” (Hebrews 10:12) Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin and by a single offering he has “perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” (10:14) Those are some pretty weird words there. Something that we’re not accustomed to talking about: “offering,” and “sanctified,” and “sacrificed.” What do those mean? What is that all about really? I think to better understand what the author of the letter to Hebrews is talking about is we need to go back; we need to remember some of the early stories from the early history of the people. And very specifically we need to go back to Egypt, when the people were in bondage, when they were in slaves in Egypt.

You may or may not remember the story. Joseph and his family had settled in Egypt and they multiplied over the centuries until they got to be so great in number that the king of Egypt was afraid of them, and so he decided to crack down and knuckle down and give them more and more restrictions until the people cried out to God for someone to help them and along comes Moses. And Moses and the Pharaoh go head to head, don’t they? Moses goes to Pharaoh and says ‘you have to let the people go’ and Pharaoh says ‘I’m not going to let the people go.’ Moses says ‘if you don’t let the people go something bad is going to happen,’ Pharaoh says ‘bring it on,’ and something bad happens. The water turns to blood. The sun is blotted out for three days. They’re descended upon by locusts; everybody gets big ugly sores all over their bodies. And each time one of these things happens to the Egyptians, the Egyptians cry out to Pharaoh to please make this stuff stop and Pharaoh’s magicians can’t make it stop so Pharaoh has to go to Moses and say ‘okay Moses you pray to your God and make this stuff stop and then you can go.’ So Moses prays to God, the plague stops. Moses goes back to Pharaoh and says ‘okay now we can go, right?’ And Pharaoh says ‘no’ and the whole thing starts all over again. Nine times this happened until finally the tenth time God says to Moses, ‘Moses this time this is it. This time what I want you to do: tell all of the people, pack your stuff because it is really happening this time. I want you to tell everybody go out into the fields. You’re going to get an unblemished lamb or an unblemished kid (a baby goat, not the ones in our families) you’re going to get an unblemished lamb or an unblemished kid, you’re going to bring it back (now this sounds a little bit rude to us in the 21st century, but you know 4,000 years ago you didn’t have Giant or Weis to go to and you had to butcher your own meat) So you are going to take that lamb or goat and you’re going to butcher it, but very specifically you’re going to gather all that blood, you’re going to capture all that blood in a bowl, you’re going to take that blood, you’re going to go to your door and on the door posts and on the lintel you’re going to paint the blood of that unblemished lamb because’ God says, ‘because I am going to send my angel of death. That angel of death is going to take the first born in each household that does not have that blood painted on the doorway.’ Now hopefully we remember the story that the angel of death does come and does take the first born of each household that does not have the blood, but for those that does have the blood, the angel of death passes over those households.

The people leave, they eventually, after wondering around in the wilderness for a while, they settle down in the chosen land and by the time that they have kings they are able to build a temple. And in the temple there is the Holy of Holies. That's the place that the high priest goes to offer atonement to ask forgiveness for the sins of everybody in the entire nation. This is kind of a little bit of an aside, but it's always kind humorous to me is that they learned that they had to tie a rope around the ankle of the high priest because the only way the high priest could enter the inner most sanctum, the Holy of Holies as it was called, is if that high priest had confessed every sin that had transpired since the last time that priest had been inside the Holy of Holies, and if that priest hadn't done that they stood a good chance of being struck dead when they entered the Holy of Holies and if that happened and they didn't have the rope around their ankle then they had to have somebody else go confess all their sins to go pull the body out of the Holy of Holies so they learned to put a rope to pull the body out. They had to be close to being perfect to enter the Holy of Holies, but they could do that. They could confess all of their sins and offer the sacrifices and go through all the rituals in order to enter the Holy of Holies. And offer sacrifice, blood sacrifice of an animal, of a perfect animal of unblemished lamb or kid.

When Jesus comes along God has been looking at the people, not only the people of Israel, but at of all the world. And was remembering that we are no longer in that right relationship with God because of that stuff that gets in between us. That stuff that we call sin. It gets between us and God and just pushes us farther and farther apart. That stuff, that sin can be just about anything. It can be drugs, it can be alcohol it can be relationships, but it is going to be different for each of us. I don't really care for most alcohol, so alcohol at least up until this point in my life is not going to be a sin in my life. But you can tempt me with Mountain Dew, that's for sure. Sin is going to be different for each of us. God looks down and wants, desires us to be back in that right relationship. So Jesus comes, Jesus the Son of God comes, Jesus who is called the "Lamb of God" comes. Now the religious people, the leaders of the day they don't like what Jesus is saying because Jesus is saying that 'God loves you regardless of what you do.' The religious leaders are saying 'oh no, no, no, you're got to do this. You've got to pay the temple tax, you've got to offer sacrifice, you've got to pray all these times during the day and during the month. You've got to do all of these rituals in order for God to love you' and Jesus says, 'no you don't. You don't have to do any of that because God loves you just the way you are.' The religious leaders don't want to hear that and so they kill Jesus.

But the amazing thing is, with Jesus on the cross, with Jesus beaten and bleeding, that this blood of Jesus comes and covers all believers. No, maybe even more than that: covers all the world. That's why we get "Christ offered for all time a single sacrifice for sin." Christ came and died and just like with Moses and the people in Egypt, when the angel passed over those households that were covered by the blood on their doors, the angel will pass over all who are covered in the blood of Christ. But it is not the angel of Physical death this time; it is the angel of Spiritual death. Because we know, don't we, that we can believe and still have aches and pains. We can believe and still fall down and hurt ourselves, we can believe and still lose all of our money in bad financial decisions. But that doesn't mean that God does not love us. It does not mean that God is no longer with us. It does not mean that the angel of death, the angel of Physical death is going to pass over us. It means rather that we belong to God always, no matter what happens to us in this life. It means that God is with us always.

But what else does it say? In verse 16 “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, I will put my law in their hearts and I will write it on their minds.” This covenant, (a covenant is a promise) in this case it’s a divine promise and God is not going to go back on that promise. “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” (V.17) The interesting thing to me is that it doesn’t say, ‘if you repent I will remember your deeds no more.’ No, it just says ‘I will put my law in their hearts and I will remember their sin no more.’ No repentance required. Now, maybe that doesn’t sit too well with us. I’ve been in conversation about this with some folks, but as near as my understanding of Christian Theology from a Lutheran perspective goes, is that no repentance is required; **HOWEVER**, while no repentance is required to *approach* God, if one is a believer, then one will *want* to repent. Repentance isn’t required, but once we believe we will ask forgiveness. That **DOESN’T** mean that we won’t fail again; it doesn’t mean that we will be perfect. What that **does** mean, though, is that when we **do** fail again, God won’t remember us failing, again. Now maybe **WE** think, maybe I think that there are some folks who don’t *deserve* to be in heaven but then I have to remind myself, ‘you know what John? It’s not up to me. It’s up to God.’

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for God who has promised is faithful. Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds.” (V 23-24) I have two boys who know how to provoke each other. I have a spouse; I know how to provoke my spouse. But how often do we provoke one another, not for those *annoying* things, but provoke one another to **love** and **good deeds**?

Let us go forth, provoking one another: those in our household, those who are gathered here, those with whom we come in contact at work or shopping or entertaining. Let us provoke them to love and good deeds and pray that they would provoke us as well. That we will remember that God loves us always, regardless. God loves us, wants us to love God, so that we can remember Christ is indeed that sacrifice and it is because of Christ that we are loved always.

Amen.