

Hebrews 10:15-25

Holy Thursday + April 18, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls
Feasts Fulfilled

In the name of Jesus.

The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Passover go together. Jesus institutes His Supper at the Passover meal, because it fulfills the Passover feast. For centuries, the people of God have remembered how He rescued them from Egypt. They've remembered the first Passover, when the Lord commanded them to take a lamb, shed its blood to mark their doors, and eat the lamb for dinner. Now, as Jesus celebrates the Passover with His disciples, He is the final Passover Lamb whose blood is about to be shed to save the lives of many, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And, as the Passover Lamb of old was given to be eaten, so He institutes His Supper, in which He gives to His people His own body and blood for the forgiveness of their sins.

The Passover Feast points to the Lord's Supper, but it is not the only one. Our epistle bids us to remember the Day of Atonement.

Back in the wilderness, the people of Israel set up camp with the tabernacle in the midst of the camp; and there, in the Holy of Holies, God dwelt with His people. Holy God dwelt with sinful man, as near as He could be without destroying them, separated only by a thick curtain. It was a blessed arrangement, for God was with His people. It was a dangerous arrangement, because sinners who came in contact with Holy God would be struck down for their unholiness. In fact, when God first commanded the Day of Atonement, He had just struck down Nadab and Abihu, the sons of the high priest, Aaron.

As time went by and sinners lived around the tabernacle, their uncleanness had a way of making holy things unholy. Once a year, therefore, the Lord commanded that the tabernacle be consecrated, made clean, and He gave specific instructions for how it was to be done.

Once a year, properly prepared by God's Word, the high priest would wash himself with water, then put on his priestly vestments. He would go to the altar for burnt offerings; and there he would start the sacrifices. He would sacrifice a bull, shedding its blood for his sins and the sins of his household. He would sacrifice a ram for the sins of the people. He would take two goats and cast lots over them. He would lay his hands on one goat, and he would confess all of the sins of Israel onto it; and once it bore the guilt of all those sins, it was the scapegoat, driven out into the wilderness and never to be seen again. The priest would then take the other goat and offer it as a sacrifice too.

Once the sacrifices were made and the blood shed, and only then, the high priest would take some of the blood and touch it to the horns of the altar. Then the high priest, and only the high priest, would take some of the blood, along with coals and incense, and enter the tabernacle. Piece by piece, he would touch all the furnishings inside with blood – the table, the incense altar and the lampstand. He did this by the Lord's instruction, for the Lord declared that the blood would cleanse these things of all unholiness.

Then, and only then, and – I imagine – with a deep breath, the high priest would push back behind that heavy curtain and enter the Holy of Holies. He would come into the presence of God.

Inside, he would sprinkle blood on the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat; for if the throne of God were unclean, He would no longer dwell there. The priest would also be sure to mix the incense and coals to create a thick, pungent cloud of smoke ... lest he look upon God in His glory and die.

That was the Day of Atonement. In Hebrew, it's Yom Kippur, literally the "day of covering," for the blood covered the sins of the people. It was for one man, the high priest, to enter; and it was to take place once a year while the people waited outside for the priest to return.

All of this pointed to Jesus, of course: that's what our epistle says. Jesus is our high priest who has made the sacrifice for our sin. He has also *been* the sacrifice for our sin. He is the ram offered for the sins of the people. He is the scapegoat who bears our sins and guilt; and in fact, remember that as soon as He was baptized, He was driven out into the wilderness for forty days to suffer the temptations of the devil. He is the only scapegoat to come back from the wilderness, for He is also the other goat who was sacrificed for our salvation. Thus, as high priest and sacrifice, He has opened the way to His Father's throne. His body is the curtain between man and God, says Hebrews 10, and the blood of Jesus Christ covers all your sin.

All this explains why the curtain tears in two when Jesus dies. It tears from top to bottom, starting thirty feet or so in the air, lest someone think man has done it. The veil is torn, the Holy of Holies is exposed ... and God is no longer there. There is no more need for Him to receive sacrifices at the temple, because *the* Sacrifice has been made. By His death, Christ has atoned for the sins of the world. Your high priest has made atonement for you.

But if the temple veil is torn to reveal that God is no longer there, where is He to be found? You look for the new veil: you look for the body and blood of Christ. And where might that be ... ?

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, "Take, eat: this is My body, which is given for you."

In the same way also, He took the cup after Supper; and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them saying, "Drink of it, all of you:" this cup is the New Testament in My blood, which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord still dwells with His people. Soon, if this sermon ever ends, the veils will be lifted from the elements, and the Word of God spoken over bread and wine. Then there is Christ – present body, blood and all.

There the Priest who was the Sacrifice is also the Host who is the Meal.

And who is this meal for – who is to draw near and come in contact with the Lord Most High? This is not given to the pastor, but to the priest. Actually, the priests. St. Peter says that you are a royal priesthood; and what do priests do? They offer sacrifices and come into the presence of God. There is no sacrifice for sin left to be made, for Christ has done that; and so you offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, declaring what He has done.

As for coming into the presence of God, the Lord is quite specific in His instructions, lest you come into His presence and receive His Supper to your judgment.

Like the high priest of old, you are properly prepared by the Word of God. Like the high priest of old, you are washed in water according to God's Word.

Like the high priest of old, you are clothed in holy garments, for you are clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Like the high priest of old, the Sacrifice has been made so that you might draw near to God.

Unlike the high priest, for whom the Lord concealed His presence with darkness and smoke, He comes to you in bread and wine. He gives Himself to you, for you. Unlike the high priest who dared to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, Jesus bids you to come often.

Do not take this sacrament for granted, for what happens at the altar is no less magnificent than what happened on the Day of Atonement. Holy God draws dangerously near for those who are not prepared, but He draws near with life and salvation for all who repent and believe. And rather than make everybody wait outside while one alone enters, He invites all of His penitent people who share the confession of this altar.

This is a meal for penitent sinners, who know they are unclean and unholy on their own. Here the Lord draws near to cleanse them, to strengthen them as His holy people, His children, His priests.

Therefore, brothers [and sisters], 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.

That Day is surely drawing near when you will look upon the glorious, holy Lord and live, for you are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

In the name of Jesus.