

Sermon Notes for 3/24/16 (Maundy Thursday – noon service)

Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN

Text: Hebrews 10:15-25

Theme: COVENANT OF BLOOD, COVENANT OF LIFE

Hymn: LSB 122 (Love Consecrates the Humblest Act)

The Point: Since Jesus has established the new covenant, a set of renewed and renewing relationships is in place between us and God and between us and one another.

Introduction: Access is a huge issue. Who has access to your personal information? Who is allowed to have access to your home? What about your vehicle(s) – who holds the keys? How many people could figure out how to get into your computer if you were not able to do so? How do you get into the place where you work? I have a fob to Jehovah – the office of the keys may have to do with forgiveness, but access to the building is vital, too, isn't it? In today's Epistle (which also serves as the text for my message), that question of access becomes important as the author speaks of a COVENANT OF BLOOD, A COVENANT OF LIFE.

“We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.” Radical change has taken place. This passage uses language dealing with the old temple. The temple was built with varying levels of access. Jewish people could go further in than Gentiles. Jewish men could go in more deeply than Jewish women. The priests had access to more central rooms. But then there was the Most Holy Place, the most sacred space in the Jewish religion. Access to that room was tightly controlled!

Under the old covenant, the Most Holy Place was absolutely forbidden to almost everyone at almost every time. Only once each year did the high priest (and ONLY the high priest) have permission (and command) to enter the Most Holy Place (that inmost room in the temple). He took the blood of animals with him to sprinkle over the mercy seat that covered the Ark of the Covenant. And he prayed for the people that they might be forgiven. But this blood was not enough to open the door of the Most Holy Place to all worshipers. They still had to stand outside and rely on the priests to do the sacrificial work.

This same chapter in which our text is found contains this telling statement: “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” Thousands of bulls and goats and other animals had to die, day after bloody day, year after bloody year, in fulfillment of the ceremonial laws that Moses had given to Israel. But the deaths of those animals could not take away the debt of sin piled up by the people. In fact, all those sacrifices together could not take away even one of the sins people had committed. And yet the sacrifices continued, on and on, year after year, always pointing toward a culminating sacrifice that WOULD take away sin, once and for all time. The message of the sacrifices pointed to THE sacrifice.

Now, the author of this letter says in a revolutionary conclusion, “we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus.” Jesus' bloody sacrifice has opened the way for us to enter into God's own presence. That was symbolized on the day of Jesus' crucifixion by the fact that the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. He has torn the dividing veil, providing us with access that we never could have otherwise. Jesus' death has opened the way to God's heart for all His children. And His death has done away with the need for additional blood sacrifices. We have the quote from Jeremiah, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” And then this powerful letter adds this: “Where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.” One sacrifice is sufficient – no more are needed!

There are more than 40 references to the blood of Christ in the New Testament, all of which testify to its importance in the salvation and daily life of the believer. Judas the betrayer spoke of it as “innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4) and Peter called it “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and

without spot” (1 Peter 1:9). It is the cleansing blood in 1 John 1:7 and the washing blood in Rev. 1:5, stressing that it removes the guilt of our sins. It is called the purchase price or the redeeming blood or the justifying blood or the peacemaking blood. That very blood that dripped from the cross to the dusty ground of Calvary provides our rescue, our salvation, and our access to our God.

Remarkable indeed, that the new believers in Jesus realized almost immediately that the old sacrificial system was out-moded with the sacrifice of Jesus’ own blood. His blood did what all those animal sacrifices could only hint about, could only point forward to. Now, instead of relying on the sacrifices offered at the temple over and over again, the church was pointed to the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Jesus as the final and complete hope for forgiveness and salvation. Because of what Jesus has done, we have a new relationship with God. We can enter into the most holy place of the Father’s embrace.

Now indeed, we can “draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” We have been baptized into the sacrifice of Jesus. We have tasted of His death by being buried in baptism, and we have been raised to new life just as He was raised from death on the third day. As a result, we can draw near to God. Just as Jesus invited Lazarus to walk out of the grave, we have been invited to come out of the tomb of our sin and rebellion and into the very presence of God Himself. We do not need to have go-betweens to stand between us and our Lord. We can go directly to Him with our needs, our concerns, our desperation, our sin – and know that He will be willing to hear and eager to answer us.

This makes all the difference for us, since we have access to God. Just as a son of the king may have access to the king when no other citizens or officials have that access, so we do not need to fear that our Father God will turn us away when we come to Him for all that we need for this life and that which is to come. God invites us tenderly into His company. God welcomes us joyfully into His fellowship. This is a high and holy honor. We have the key to the family safe, where all treasures lie in Christ.

Because He is true and holy, we can “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.” Our Lord will not back away from His promises, and those promises bind us to Him forever. “I will never leave you or forsake you.” “I will forgive your sins and remember them no more.” “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you.” “I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

And because we have a new and established relationship with God our heavenly Father, we also share a new relationship with our brothers and sisters. So the author of Hebrews continues, “Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.” Many of our relationships are marked by competition. Can we be the first chair in our section of the band? Will our scores be sufficient to allow entry into the best university? Who will get the big promotion at work? Can our business outdo the competitors down the street? Can our favorite team go deep into the NCAA tournament?

Relationships within the body of Christ put a new and different spin on our aims and desires. Our goal is to spur each other on toward love and good deeds. In other words, the biggest competition is to see how my service can elevate my brothers and sisters in their walk with Christ. I am a Michigan Wolverines fan. But Michigan State is killing them this year. One of the reasons I imagine Michigan State going a long way in the tournament (maybe winning it all?) is that they have more assists than any other team in Division I basketball, almost 100 more than their nearest rival. That is a team that knows how to play as a team. What sort of assist record do you have? Is one of your goals in life to help spur your friends, family members, co-workers, church friends toward greater love and good deeds? What a blessing it would be if each of us were aimed in that direction, instead of the constant drive for more and better for myself!

Conclusion: Since Jesus has established the new covenant, a set of renewed and renewing relationships is

in place between us and God and between us and one another. We have access to God, and we are enabled to bring to others the good news of their access to Him as well, gained not by anything that we or they have accomplished, but always and only through the precious blood of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. In His holy and blameless name, AMEN!