

February 21, 2021 The Better Way Pt. 5 Hebrews 9:11-28

Dearly Beloved;

I have a number of announcements for you this morning. First I am announcing that provided we are still rated as a green area, in person worship will become available led by myself in the sanctuary on March the 7th. The reason for delaying reopening is caution. I want to be able to see what is happening, with schools and businesses reopening, with the additional danger of the variants to Covid-19. If you are uncomfortable about attending, do not do so. I will be continuing to post the script for the Sermon on the web page, along with the video of the Sermon From The Dining Room Table. In addition to our own people from the congregation in Stirling, we have a viewership that includes people in Ottawa, Toronto, and Northwestern Ontario.

Secondly, I would ask you to remember the Hupe family in your prayers. There has been a death in Bryan's extended family. They will be travelling to Arnprior on Saturday. I mention this because I want you to pray for safe travel. Also, as Trish mounts the Script and the Video on the Church web site, we have laboured to get them up early before they leave, knowing they will be exhausted when they get back late Saturday evening.

Thirdly, Annual Reports and the Budget proposal will be mailed out, if things go according to plan very soon. Please participate by following instructions, and mailing in your affirmation of the budget proposal. The numbers show, it is a

conservative budget, in keeping with the uncertainty of the times, and the affects of the pandemic. Our Board and Session are eager to have your expression of approval, as we attempt to cope with the challenges ahead. By our canon law, silence, or failure to vote would normally indicate being in favour of the motions you are asked to vote on. I, the Session and the Board are asking for a committed show of support. Please take time to consider the matter, and then if you approve, express it in tangible terms.

With that let us turn to the word. I am asking you to read Hebrews 9:11-28 in its entirety.

This message is part of a series. It is sound teaching practice to briefly review the ground we have covered in 4 former sermons. Hebrews is so titled because of the audience to which it was written. In those early years following the resurrection of Jesus, Pentecost and the persecution which fell hard upon the church, the vast majority of believers were by race Jewish, as were the 12 disciples. They had been schooled in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. They had lived the balance of their lives as members of the covenant of Moses, expecting to worship in local buildings, with a singular allegiance and longing to make a trip to Jerusalem and participate in worship in the historic Temple.

When the Romans recognized that the followers of Jesus were not traditional Jews, the persecution was deadly and merciless. There were some who would never leave Judea,

but many fled for safety, and sizeable numbers of them sought the umbrella of invisibility by returning to their traditional Jewish ways. It was safer to blend in, than to stand out. The letter to the Hebrews was a call to those followers of Jesus to stand fast in their faith, to be bold, if necessary to die for their faith in HIM as the Christ, the Messiah. It is in that light that the letter opens by identifying this new relationship with the living God as a better way. The tangible revelation of God in Jesus ministry, miracles and sacrifice, culminating in HIS resurrection made it clear this was a better revelation than that of the old covenant.(Hebrews 1:1-4) In Hebrews 7:19 the writer, unidentified in the text, but traditionally believed to be Paul, says this new covenant involves a better hope. He is talking about salvation by means of faith alone in the marvelous grace of God. Far from doing away with the office of the High Priest, the writer goes on to say Jesus is our High Priest in this new relationship. He showed his commitment to save by his suffering on the cross. And it is revealed that HE is God's chosen by the reality of Easter morning, HIS resurrection from the dead. In Hebrews 8:6 the new covenant with God is called a better covenant. Why? Salvation is not to be earned by being "good." The fact is we are not very good at being good. Salvation is given as a gift, from God the Father to us through Jesus who took upon HIMSELF our sinfulness.

Today as we read in Hebrews 9:23 the writer says this covenant relationship with God is characterized by better sacrifices, it is the ultimate better way. I am not going to do a verse by verse explanation of the argument simply because of

time constraints. But there are stepping stone verses like those that one might use to cross a brook, that make a plain and simple explanation possible.

How are mere mortals like ourselves to have access to the One True God? There was a chamber in the old Temple called the Holy of Holies. Once a year the high priest would go into that chamber, to meet with God. They would tie a rope about him in case he died in the experience. The rope would allow others to haul his body out, without risking their own necks in the process.

In Luke 23, beginning at verse 44 the good doctor describes Jesus death. Three details. In the middle of the afternoon it grew dark. The suns light could not pierce the gathered storm clouds. The curtain in the Temple, the entrance to the Holy of Holies was torn in two, top to bottom. In Hebrews 9:11, the author speaks of Jesus entering the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, to meet with HIS Father, face to face. But what it says in that verse is that was not the man made Holy of Holies Jesus entered but the real one, the One in heaven. The curtain is torn because it is no longer relevant. Jesus did it. He met the Father on our behalf. Salvation became salvation by grace. Given not because of human achievement, but for the willingness to follow based on faith.

There follows a number of statements any Hebrew would immediately understand. One of the basics of ancient worship involved the offering of sacrifices to God. Burnt

offerings. It involved killing something that was alive, bleeding it and then roasting the meat, that the pleasant aroma might rise to God. The point is that there is something fundamental to be understood. There is no salvation without an offering of blood. In the Hebrew experience lamb was the sweetest meat. And Jesus on the cross becomes that perfect lamb offered to God. HE is at pains to remind Pilate, that it is an illusion that he is in charge of whether or not Jesus lives or dies. Jesus is the Son of God. He makes HIMSELF the perfect offering, and there is salvation because HIS blood is shed. We are able to serve God because Jesus blood was shed to save us.(Hebrews 9:14)

In verse 15, the writer of the letter changes the metaphor. He speaks of Jesus giving HIMSELF in our place, a ransom paid to set us free. Here again the letter expresses that we understand ourselves to be sinners because the Old Testament with its commandments and laws defined what sin is. I quoted Paul Anka's song, sung and made popular by Frank Sinatra in one of his farewell concerts, "I did it my way..." That is always the greatest temptation, to live our own way as opposed the way of faith to which Jesus has called us. It is God's way for us. And according to the whole of the Bible, but especially in the New Testament, it is the better way.

One final point here. In verse 24 of Hebrews 9 we are presented with another image which is meant to encourage and strengthen our commitment to follow Jesus. Jesus is here portrayed as the defense lawyer, the one who appears for us to plead our cause and secure our standing as righteous and

forgiven servants of the heavenly throne. If in your past you have been taught to fear standing before God at the end of your life to answer for your conduct, here is a word to allay your fears. Jesus is there even now, pleading your case.

Reminding the Judge that HE gave HIMSELF for you and me. He did it once. He did it for all of us and for all time. HIS blood was shed...the beatings, the whipping, the crown of thorns, the nails that pierced HIS hands, and feet, the spear that tore open HIS side...HIS blood was shed to save.

The new arrangement involves I's dotted and T's crossed to assure there is forgiveness, for those who have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, who dare to follow Jesus, who is the better way.

We are now officially in the season of Lent, the period in the Christian calendar which leads us from Ash Wednesday (which was February 17 to Easter eve. Easter is April the 4th. God willing we will be able to celebrate it in the Sanctuary under the limitations of best practices in a Covid-19 world. I invite you to join me for a new series entitled, "The Way."

Let us pray;

Dear Lord and Redeemer, Heavenly Father, Spirit Divine, we bow our heads before you because we want to worship and serve you, and be willing to go to those to whom you send us to serve in your name. For all the time we have spent trying to understand that you love us, we still stumble over the concept that forgiveness is real, and given freely. We

are simply suspicious that we are not worthy in your sight of the grace you have given. Open our eyes that we might see the blood that was shed on Calvary's hill was shed for us. Each one of us. O God who loves people who have dirty hands, dark pasts, and sin-stained souls, help us to treasure Jesus whom we meet in the letter to the Hebrews. Thank you, Lord, for the writer's witness that your grace is real and the final definition of true love. Amen