

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 10 – August 6th and 9th, 2009

Exodus 24:3-11

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do." Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.

He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.

Dear Children of God,

Anyone who has raised children, knows that there are going to be times where blood gets on clothes. It may be a bloody nose or a fall or simply an accident where blood stains your clothes. The real question is how do you get blood stains out of clothes. Most people would agree that blood stains can be very difficult to get out of clothes. Since I am not an expert, I looked to the experts on the internet and there were more remedies than I could realistically list in a sermon. But the majority of the remedies had to do with washing your blood stained clothes in a mixture of cold water and some form of mild detergent or maybe even applying some hydrogen peroxide directly to the stained area. One of the remedies that came up quite often was to use your own saliva right on the stain which has certain enzymes to break down the stain.

While blood stains on clothes can be very difficult to remove and there are a number of capable remedies to remove help remove them, the real question is, what does it take to remove sin from a sinful heart like yours and mine? If you go on the internet and search, you might find lots of different remedies. You find remedies that include work-righteous ideas where you can take away sins by doing good things. You might find remedies that look to certain false god's. But today we will once again find out that to remove sin from a sinful heart has only one remedy and it isn't really found on some help site on the internet. The remedy can only be found in God's book the Bible. The remedy which might seem odd, has everything to do with the shedding of blood – Jesus' blood. So today we will once again take a look at God's remedy for our sinful hearts using the theme:

God's Covenant Of Grace Is Our Only Hope

- 1. His commandments show that we need it**
- 2. Old Testament sacrifices symbolize it**
- 3. New Testament sacraments seal it**

Can you even begin to imagine what a gruesome scene is depicted in our text? There is blood everywhere—gallons of it—splashed and sprinkled on everything and everyone. It's on the altar, on the ground, on Moses, and on the people. The special effects director of a major movie studio would have a field day with this scene, wouldn't he? But this bloody mess was absolutely necessary, for in the book of

Hebrews we are told, **“The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (9:22)**. A covenant had been made, a binding agreement between God and his people, one so serious that blood was required for it to be sealed. In this covenant God instructed his people how he wanted them to live. He even promised to bless them if they would live according to his instructions. And a willing people, grateful for their salvation, promised earlier to their forefather, Abraham, answered, **“We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey.”** To confirm this covenant between a gracious God and a grateful people, blood was used, **“blood of the covenant,”** as Moses called it.

For three days the Jewish people had been encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. There God had appeared to them in a thick cloud and had given them his commands. Now the people were to respond as to whether or not they were in agreement with them. What a serious and solemn moment in Israel’s storied history this was.

At the foot of the mountain Moses built an altar to symbolize the presence of the Lord. Around this altar he set up twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he commissioned young Israelite men to prepare the sacrifices for the altar. When they had finished, Moses took the blood and splashed half of it on the altar and sprinkled the other half on the people. All who were in attendance knew what this meant. A gracious God and his grateful people were now bound together in a covenant relationship. The sprinkling of blood on both altar (representing God) and people was a visible sign that they and their God were one—he for them and they for him. Moses put it this way: **“This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”**

The thought of blood is not necessarily a pleasant one, is it? Many get quite queasy at the sight of it. And yet, true theology, the theology of the Bible, is a blood theology. In fact, over 300 times blood is mentioned in the Old Testament. Fellow redeemed, our redemption is dependent on blood. Paul writes, **“We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Ep 1:7)**. And, lest we wonder whose blood, John adds, **“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin” (1 Jn 1:7)**. As we study the Scriptures, over and over again we see that God uses blood to point his people ahead to the Messiah, whom he had promised would redeem the world. This Messiah once and for all would unite God and sinful mankind by the shedding of his holy, precious blood.

That day at the foot of Mount Sinai, the blood of animals splashed on the altar and sprinkled on the people reminded them that they dare not come into God’s presence—much less enter into a covenant relationship with him—unless he made it possible. That blood would also be a visible reminder for them in the days to come—when they quickly and frequently forgot God’s commands and with their sins fractured their fellowship with him—that blood, the holy, precious blood of God himself, was necessary to reestablish peace between them and their God. What a picture we have here of Jesus shedding his blood for us. What a foreshadowing of our forgiveness from a gracious God through that blood. Is it any wonder that we love to sing of the precious blood of Jesus?

From Mount Sinai and our text we again turn our attention to the Lord’s Supper and the wonderful meal of our Savior’s body and blood that he gave us in the upper room in Jerusalem that first Thursday night. This picture of being cleansed and forgiven by blood fits perfectly together with the New Testament sacrament of The Lord’s Supper. When our text speaks to us of the **“blood of the covenant,”** we immediately recall Jesus’ words to his disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem: **“Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:27,28)**. The covenant made on Mount Sinai has long passed out of existence, but the one that Jesus gave on the first Maundy Thursday still remains. While partaking of the Lord’s Supper, we look at Jesus’ wonderful covenant and the precious blood that confirmed it.

But what does this new covenant of his blood mean to us? It all depends, doesn’t it, on how we see ourselves? What do I see when I examine my heart and my life in the light of God’s holy law? How well

have I kept his will as he has revealed it to me on the pages of his Word? What does it mean to me when, service after service, week after week, I stand before his holy altar here in church with these words on my lips: “I am by nature sinful” and “I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions”? What does it mean when on my pillow at night I pray, “Father, forgive me my sins as I forgive those who sin against me”? Do these words come from a heart that is saddened because it sees sin’s grime embedded under every fingernail and sin’s dirt ingrained in every tissue of life?

If the answer to these questions is “yes,” if I recognize my natural unworthiness before God, then the new covenant of Jesus’ blood will mean everything to me. For in this sacrament the Savior comes to me, the sinner, to me, personally and individually. In it he comes to me and says, “Here, take my body. I gave it for you. Here, drink my blood; I shed it for you. Your sins are forgiven. Now go in peace.” Can there be any sweeter, any more personal, any more comforting way for Jesus to show his love for me than with the very body and blood that he gave and shed for me on Calvary’s cross? So come, my dear Christian friends! Come with a heart full of faith and confidence that in this covenant of blood your forgiveness from God is sealed!

And, then, assured of your forgiveness from God, rest assured that you are in fellowship with God. Our text speaks of this in striking detail. Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended Mount Sinai to sit down for a meal in the presence of God. Our text even says that they “**saw the God of Israel**”—not in all his glory, of course, for God later told Moses, “**You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live**” (Ex 33:20). On that day on Mount Sinai God graciously dimmed his glory and, in so doing, showed special favor to these men.

Though we are not told exactly in what form God appeared to them, the very fact that Moses speaks of God’s feet resting on pavement suggests that God chose, for their sake, to assume some type of human form. Suffice it to say that God, before whom we sinful human beings cannot stand by nature, came to them. His fist was not clenched in anger against them, as they might have feared as they scaled the slope of the mountain. No, they could sit and eat in God’s presence in peace. How close they and God were—all because of the covenant of blood.

From the meal on Mount Sinai we again turn our attention to the meal of the Lord’s Supper. “**Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins**” is what our Savior says. In this meal of his body and blood, the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation are ours. How can we ask God for anything more? What better way is there than this for God to assure us that he and we are one again, that he has bridged the gap, that he “**was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting [our] sins against [us]**” (2 Cor 5:19)?

Maybe we can think of it in this way. A child has badly misbehaved and needed to be punished. To underscore the seriousness of the wrongdoing, the father sent the child off to bed early and without the normal activities that preceded bedtime. After some time had elapsed, the bedroom door slowly opened. The child came quietly down the stairs and into the family room, where the father was sitting. There, in a voice barely above a whisper, the child asked, “Daddy, do you still love me?” That penitent child just had to have this question answered by the father before the child could fall asleep. The father lovingly gathered her up into his arms and, hugging her as tightly as he could, said to her, “Yes, I still love you!”

“God Still Loves Us” is what Jesus is telling us in the Lord’s Supper. In fact, with more than just words he tells us that he loves us. In the Lord’s Supper, he shows us as he puts his arms around us in Holy Communion. He hugs us as tightly as he can and says, “You are the sons and daughters of my heavenly Father, redeemed, restored, and forgiven by my precious blood. You are mine. Yes, I love you!” So come, fellow Christians! Come and be assured of God’s forgiveness, sealed by this covenant of blood. And then leave with the sure and confident hope that, as a result of sins forgiven, you are at peace with God. We are still in his family—now and forever. Amen.