

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fifth Sunday after Lent, March 22, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 364:1-5, 628:3-4, 220, 441, 242.

Lessons: Leviticus 16: 1-22, Hebrews 10:1-14, John 8:46-59.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 9:11-15.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We today are most blessed in the history of the world. We can look back on the complete fulfillment of our salvation. We don't have to look forward to our salvation literally and physically coming in the future as people in Old Testament times did. We do not have to look forward with symbols and pictures as they did.

The letter to the Hebrews is a marvelous window into the Old Testament with its sacrifices – something that is pretty much foreign to Gentiles like us sitting here in the middle of the United States.

The letter containing our sermon text was written to the Hebrews, that is, to the Jewish Christians assuring them that they had not made a mistake following and believing in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah and Savior promised in the Old Testament.

In the Word of God before us today, we see

**CHRIST, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST**

- 1. God demanded animal sacrifices in the Old Testament.**
- 2. The perfection of Christ's sacrifice.**

First, we must remember that priests and especially the high priest offered blood sacrifices at the tabernacle and later at the temple.

The high priest worked and sacrificed in the tabernacle and later, after the time of David, in the temple. The high priest had to *“enter by means of the blood of goats and calves.”* *“The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.”* This is how God brought his Old Testament people to Christ. They had to see and understand that they could not purify themselves before the holy God. So blood sacrifices were necessary to point them forward to the redeemer whom God would send.

The priest had *“to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.”* (Hebrews 7:27) And he needed blood, the blood of animals. This was a daily occurrence at the altar of burnt offering in the tabernacle.

The tabernacle, also called the “Tent of Meeting” was a movable place to worship God. Shortly after Israel escaped from Egypt through the Red Sea God gave very specific directions and dimensions for its building in the book of Exodus. It was designed so they could move it with them. It was all enclosed by a fence about 7 ½ feet high that was about 150 feet long by 75 feet wide. Within this fence was the Holy Place, about 45 feet long by 15 feet wide and 15 feet high, containing two rooms with the entrance at the eastern end. The western end was the Holy of Holies, or the most holy place. This contained the ark of the covenant with the stone tablets containing the Law. Inside the second, larger room, called the holy place was the altar of incense. Outside the holy place was an altar for burnt offerings.

Only the high priest entered the holiest place and only once each year, on the Day of Atonement, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson. And here we find a very specific foreshadowing of Christ. The only one who could go into the Holy of Holies was the High Priest, and then only once per year. He had to sacrifice a

bullock, that is, a young bull for the sins of himself and the priests, sprinkling its blood inside the holy place. Then he took two goats. One was killed as a sin offering for the people, and its blood was sprinkled like the blood of the young bull. He took the remaining goat, called the scapegoat, placed his hands on its head and confessed the sins of the people. It was then sent into the wilderness to die. With the sins of the people laid on its head, it was made the sin bearer of the nation. The flesh of the young bull and of the goat that had been killed were taken outside the camp and burned. The high priest had to do this because God demanded it and so that the people who believed in God could be made ceremonially clean. The ram was to be a burnt offering for the Lord.

All of this annual sacrifice was continued later at the temple in Jerusalem, after God gave detailed instructions to Solomon for building God's temple. The temple was similar, but about twice as large.

Have you noticed that the scriptures much more often use the word "offer" rather than "give" and "offering" rather than "gift" as God's people make offerings? Because our God is perfect in everything he does, that is not just a coincidence or accident of language. To "offer" means to present for acceptance, to propose as payment, to present an offering in worship. "Give" is the idea of making a present of. We offer gifts to God – and if it weren't for Christ and his work, we could only hope that he would accept them as gifts.

But the physical offerings and sacrifices aren't the most important thing. God teaches us in Psalm 51 ***"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."*** (Psalms 51:15-17)

And the idea of "giving" also implies that I am giving – yielding something of my own. But we have and possess nothing at all except sinfulness. So we can't give what is really not ours. In hymn 441, we sing: "We give Thee but Thine own, Whate'er the gift may be' All that we have is Thine alone, A trust, O Lord, from Thee." So anything that we offer to God is only that which he first entrusted to our care, to our stewardship.

The first readers of this letter to the Hebrew Christians knew and understood the Old Testament sacrifices very well. God tells us all here that Christ Jesus ***"did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves."***

***"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"***

The Old Covenant was a shadow of the Christ, who was the real, final sacrifice of all sins. We read earlier in Hebrews ***"Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. Such a high priest meets our need--one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself."*** (Hebrews 7:23-27)

When the people sacrificed animals, God considered their faith and obedience, cleansed them from sin, and made them ceremonially acceptable, according to Old Testament law.

But Christ's sacrifice transforms our lives and hearts and makes us clean on the inside. His sacrifice is infinitely more effective than animal sacrifices. His sacrifice is the blood of the perfect, sinless Son of God.

***"When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation."***

The perfection of Christ's redemption is clear in our sermon text. Christ came as a High Priest of the good things to come, through a better and more perfect tent not made by hands, that is, not of this creation, neither through the blood of goats and oxen, but through his own blood. He entered once and for always into the Holy Place, obtaining eternal redemption. Christ is here placed into the very center of the Gospel proclamation. He has come, he has presented himself, he was sent by God in the fullness of time as a High Priest. He gives us an eternal redemption which he has earned for us by paying the ransom required by the justice of his heavenly Father.

The Word of God here tells exactly how this was done, saying that Christ appeared through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by human hands, not pertaining to this present creation, not constructed of gold or silver or woven materials.

It was the tabernacle of his human nature, of his flesh and blood, which enabled him to shed his blood for us, by which he approached God. By giving his flesh, his human life, into death, Christ became partaker of the glory of his Father and was exalted to the right hand of God the Father in heaven. It was not the blood of goats or bulls which this High Priest shed, as did the priests of the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement and at other times, but it was his own most precious and divine blood. That is what gave to the ransom its perfect and eternal value which he paid. He gave his life only once. He shed his blood only once for us, but that sacrifice was once and for always and it paid for the redemption of the whole world forever. The high priests of the Old Testament had to renew their atonement for the sins of the people every year, chiefly because the sacrifices which they brought were symbolical; but here no such repetition is necessary: ***"the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*** (1 John 1:7)

There is no mention in the New Testament of Jesus offering any blood sacrifices. They were offered for him, as at his circumcision, but he did not offer any. Blood sacrifices were demanded by God for his people, and they included sacrifices of cattle, sheep, goats, lambs, rams, doves, pigeons,

But Christ did not need this to approach God. He was, after all, the Holy God himself as well as a true man, and as a true man he was sinless, so he had no need for anyone or anything to take his sins away. But he did offer a blood sacrifice.

So, to make a final comparison: In the Old Testament God demanded continual sacrifice. Christ is the conclusive sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice was perfect and final. It provided a thorough cleansing, not just a ceremonial outward cleansing. ***"He entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption."***

***"How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"*** Christ is the only mediator we or any human needs. Paul writes: ***"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time."*** (1 Timothy 2:5-6)

In the very next chapter we read: ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us 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."*** (Hebrews 10:19-22)

The Old Covenant, often referred to as the Old Testament, is based on the Law: do this perfectly and you shall live. The New Covenant is totally the fact that Christ did it all. This is really a unilateral covenant, that is, one-sided. God does it all. God provides the perfect sacrificial lamb and because of that he assures us that our sins are forgiven and we shall live eternally.

You can be assured that ***"Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant."*** Rejoice in that freedom and serve God! Amen.