



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, October 30-November 5 (B) – Hebrews 9:11-14

Focus: *Making Things Right*

word of life

“... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!”

Hebrews 9:14 (NRSV)

Read Hebrews 9:11-14

Our reading continues the theme of Jesus as the great high priest. The verses for today make reference to the most significant and important responsibility of the high priest. On the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) the high priest offered blood sacrifices for his sins and the sins of his people. (The detailed ritual is found in Leviticus 16.) No work was to be done that day. Fasting and penance were observed. The high priest was to enter the temple and offer a bull (without blemish) as a sacrifice for his sins and the sins of his house/lineage. Then, he was to take the blood of the bull and the blood of a goat (also without blemish) and go behind a veil to enter the Holy of Holies. (This was the only time during the year the Holy of Holies was entered.) The blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. Another live goat was then presented, and the priest was to lay both hands on the goat and transfer all the sins and faults of the people. This goat – the scapegoat – was then cast off into the desert, carrying with it all the people’s sins.

1. *What was the purpose of animal sacrifice in the Jewish faith?*
2. *How do we understand sacrifice in the Christian faith?*

The author of Hebrews obviously knew the ritual well and used the theme of the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement to articulate and interpret the sacrifice of Jesus. The sacrifice of Christ – the shedding of his blood – reconciled us to God and restored or atoned the relationship between God and sinful humanity (at-one-ment). Christ as the great high priest entered “...once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.” (Hebrews 9:12 NRSV) Once again, the sacrifice of Jesus is sufficient for all time. It does not need to be offered again and again.

This theme echoes the Gospel of Matthew’s account of the Last Supper. After blessing and distributing the bread, Jesus took a cup of wine, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27-28 NRSV) The old covenant of the Day of Atonement, with the blood of animal sacrifices, is replaced by a new covenant, sealed by the blood of Jesus.

3. *How would you define “atonement”?*
4. *How is Holy Communion related to atonement?*

This section concludes by comparing the sacrifice of animals with the sacrifice of Jesus. If the blood of animals sanctify and reconcile God’s people defiled by sin, “... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!” (Hebrews 9:14 NRSV) In Christ, the great high priest becomes the pure, unblemished sacrifice which restores us to God.

5. *What does it mean to you for Christ to have been sacrificed?*
6. *How does the sacrifice of Christ change your life?*

word among us

The Christian faith is one of great paradox. Those who are last will be first; the lowly will be lifted up, and mighty will be cast down; strength is found in weakness; death brings life. A cross becomes a crown.

1. *Can you think of other paradoxes in the Bible?*
2. *Are the paradoxes of the Christian faith comforting or unsettling? Why?*

The reading from Hebrews describes yet another paradox of the faith. Jesus, the great high priest, pure and sinless, offers a holy sacrifice, not of animals as an earthly high priest. No, Jesus' sacrifice is of himself. Through his suffering, death, obedience to God, and resurrection, Jesus bridges the chasm between God and humanity. He pours out his life-blood for all. The priest becomes the perfect sacrifice, putting us in a right relationship with God.

3. *What does it mean to have a right relationship with God?*

Sometimes, when a relationship has been strained, one of the parties will say, "I want to make things right." It is an acknowledgement that something is broken and needs to be repaired. It is an expression of commitment to the relationship. It reflects a desire for reconciliation. Through his sacrificial obedience and his suffering and death, Jesus says in word and deed, "I want to make things right. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." The words from Hebrews express it well: "... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God."

(Hebrews 9:14 NRSV)

4. *Give other examples when someone has said, "I want to make things right."*
5. *What impact did this expressed desire have on the situation or the relationship?*
6. *Take a moment to silently reflect if there are some relationships you need to make right.*

faith practice in daily life

Hear God's Word and share in the Lord's Supper

We gather weekly to celebrate a new covenant – one sealed by Jesus. We not only hear the words of the covenant; we experience it as we gather around bread and wine. Our relationship with God is restored through the sacrificial gift we receive in Holy Communion.

As we celebrate this reconciliation, we proclaim the paradox of the faith: "Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God. This is the feast of victory for our God, for the Lamb who was slain has begun his reign." (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 140) The Lamb who was sacrificed is the risen Lord of all creation, and we know the freedom of forgiveness.

7. *Think through the liturgy in your worship service. Are there other instances of paradox? Are there other expressions of Jesus' sacrifice?*

Prayer

O Jesus, you were willing to die on the cross to make things right. We praise you for your sacrifice for us. Amen

last word

Take the initiative to make things right
with someone in your life.

Daily Faith Practices

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