

Twenty-eighth Sunday after Pentecost – November 17th, 2024
A ONCE FOR ALL SACRIFICE

Prayer

Abba, thank you for letting us come into your presence to learn from you and to praise and bless you.

AMEN

Background

Over the past couple of weeks, we've heard about how the sons of Levi, the priests of Judaism, offered the blood of animals as a sacrifice for the sins of the people and how this was but a mere foreshadowing of the ultimate, once for all sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world.

Our Actions

This system of sacrifice begs the question – why was this necessary in the first place? And the answer goes back to Genesis, God's nature, and the God's intention for His creation.

Man was never meant to die; death is a result of the fall and the subsequent corruption of the good creation that God made. As God both warned and promised in the beginning (Gen 3:3),

but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

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We know what happened next, and, after a long life, God kept that promise to Adam (Gen 5:5)

Thus, all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died.

We are no better than Adam. We've inherited the corrupt nature of our forefathers, and our wills are, according to Luther, bound to sin and evil. Verse 17 specifically mentions both sins and lawless deeds – what are these two and are they different?

The word used for **sin** is hamartiōn (hah-mar-TEE-on), literally to miss the mark or to err. The term implies a deviation from God's standards and a failure to live up to His holiness. The original word that is translated as **lawless deed** is anomiōn (an-om-ee'-on), which means without the law or to disregard the law. It denotes a willful disregard for God's commandments and a lifestyle characterized by sin and rebellion against divine order. These seem to mirror the words we sometimes use during the confession in this Divine Service:

*We have sinned against You . . . , by what we **have done**
and what we **have left undone**.*

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God's Reaction

And how does our loving God react to these failures, done both by action and inaction? Verse 17, quoting the prophet Jeremiah (31:34b) is clear:

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

and elsewhere in scripture God says (Ps 103:12):

as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

Just how far is the east from the west? Well, you can go on forever going either east or west, so our transgressions are completely removed from us.

But we also know that God is both just and a keeper of His promises, so while He remembers our sins no more, the penalty, the death penalty, needed to be paid. As the sermon title implies and verse 12 makes clear, it is by the once-for-all sacrifice of His own life that God's justice has indeed been satisfied. And this sacrifice, this atonement, wasn't just for some people, as taught by Calvin, but for each and every person across time and space. This finished work of

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Christ is objective – it happened over two thousand years ago outside the city of Jerusalem.

The benefits of this completed act, the forgiveness of sins, is delivered to us by the Holy Spirit working with and through the means that He has chosen – Word and Sacrament. We know too that God has promised something about His word (Isaiah 55:11)

so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Let see how this text speaks to these means.

(1) Verse 22 speaks of pure water, a reference to the washing away of sin and the coming of the Holy Spirit through **Baptism**.

(2) Verses 23 and 24 talk about how we are to stir up and encourage one another. This reflects God's promise (Rom 10:17)

*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the **word***
of Christ

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When we gather in this Divine Service, you hear the absolution – that your sins are forgiven, you hear the lessons read, and, provided I haven't put you to sleep, you hear the sermon.

(3) Verse 19 proclaims that we are enabled to enter the Holy place by the blood of Jesus, which He offers to us at the **Holy Supper** as recorded by Mark (Mark 14:23- 24):

he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. . .

That's the **HOW**, but **WHY** did God die for you and me?

First, as I said earlier, God is faithful and will keep his promises. In Genesis (3:15) we read of the promise that God made to Satan:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

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So it was that Jesus, offspring of Eve according to His human nature, was promised to Adam and Eve as a savior who would restore the created order.

Second, God is a loving Father, who loves us in a **selfless** and **unconditional** manner (agape) as we read in John's first letter (1 John 4:8):

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

And finally, to reiterate the **WHO**. God makes this promise to all who hear the words of the Gospel, the words of promise, and through them, are given the faith to believe that God exists and the He does indeed keep ALL His promises. May it be so with all of us here today.

AMEN