

Sermon for Good Friday 2010

“Therefore, my friends, we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, through his flesh...” Hebrews 10:19-20.

Cast your memory back to Sunday School and some model of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Perhaps Cathy Nicholson or some other teacher helped you.

Three Temples in Jerusalem’s history.

Solomon’s/The Second/Herod’s.

Their construction somewhat described in passages in Exodus.

Built on a model of increasing holiness.

From the forecourt to the Holiest of Holies.

Each space a bit narrower, each a step or two up.

The personnel admitted to each fewer and fewer.

And less and less often.

The inner sanctum the place of the Ark of the Covenant; God’s resting place.

Where only the High Priest entered once per year.

And between that Holy of Holies and the other parts of the Temple stood its great curtain.

Exodus 26:31 *“You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of old and rest on four bases of silver...and the curtain shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy.”*

A rich and beautiful textile, to shield the holiest from human view.

What a contrast with the Cross.

On Good Friday, nothing about the holiness of God is shielded from our view.

God on trial; God accused; God scourged for our sake.

Jesus, the God-Man, practically naked.

Suffering and dying in public view.

No curtain to shield him at all.

In Temple, much was hidden from public view

Various sacrifices behind curtains and screens

Propitiatory offerings and rituals done by the priestly class

Israel understood this to be God's will,
God's way of making sinful humanity whole
I do not mean to run it down; this was the revelation of God.

But in Jesus and on Good Friday, God made it plain for all to see

After years of pursuing humanity by secret priestly action,
After years of pursuing humanity by prophets,
After years of pursuing humanity in the teaching and miracles of Jesus,
Finally, this wondrous display of suffering love
This eternal emblem of God's love for us,
The love that pays our debt for us, the love that makes us whole a God's
own expense.
Made plain for all to see.

Thus on the Cross Jesus became our high priest and the saving victim

In the most public way, offering the sacrifice in full view.
No longer looking at a curtain that concealed
But at the flesh that made God's love and forgiveness eternally clear.
He has replaced the curtain of the Temple with his own flesh.

And so we can draw near, as you have today, full of assurance.

Draw near and look on your salvation.
On the Lamb of God who gives his own life for the sake of the world.
You who are baptized have been sprinkled clean from evil and
washed with pure water.
Christ accomplished what no human mediator could achieve;
forgiveness complete.
And so we have confidence.

**Of course, the Evangelists tell us that the curtain of the Temple was torn at
the moment of Jesus' death.**

From top to bottom, from heaven to earth, God making us whole.
His atoning death broke down the wall between God and humanity
He gave his life to make one those things that had been divided.
As he was broken on the Cross, we were joined to God.
Atonement.

In many medieval churches and some others, a rood screen.

A great crucifix, with the Beloved disciple and the Blessed Virgin standing
quite near, not far away.

Recreating the moment when the dying Lord gave John and Mary into one another's care.

The screen and scene would frame your view of the altar, where the sacrament that still shows forth his death is celebrated.

Such screens make clear another truth about the Atonement.

That as humanity was reconciled to God by Christ's death,
So too his death is the foundation for a new life between humans.

Look around at the motley crew that is the church.

Sinners all, but now brothers and sisters

Who know one another as one for whom Christ died.

A people forgiven who can forgive.

A people whose Lord was broken and who can confess their brokenness.

Because Jesus gave his life for you, you are a holy people.

In Exodus, *the curtain shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy.*"

The walls and curtains that separated us are gone.

We are made of one blood by the shedding of his blood.

And we have hope to be holy; to be joined to God.

**Let it be our prayer and our resolution to walk, with joy and thanksgiving,
through the new and living way he has opened for us.**