

Pastor Shaun Arndt
April 2, 2021
Good Friday Tenebrae

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood... to (Jesus) be glory... forever and ever! Amen.

We mediate on the words of Matthew 27:50-51, where we read: ⁵⁰**After Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.** ⁵¹**Suddenly, the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and rocks were split.** *The Word of the Lord.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

At the moment of Jesus' death, the Father in Heaven made it clear something of the utmost importance had just happened. We could say he literally “**shook**” the world, that we might pay attention to this Jesus who gave His life for us.

He also did something that must have **shook** the priests in the temple that day.

Jesus dies at 3 p.m., at the very moment the priests in the temple of the true God are preparing the evening sacrifice. They feel the rumbling of the floor beneath their feet. They see the shaking of the golden lampstand.

And in the dimness of the sanctuary, they hear the sound of ripping and tearing. An unseen hand has taken hold upon the top of the curtain veil, a giant barrier some 80 feet high and thicker than a man's hand.

In a timeless moment, this curtain is torn from the top to the bottom like so much paper. And it exposes that mysterious room--where only the High Priest entered once a year with the blood of sacrifice— the Holy of Holies – the place of God's presence – now stands open.

It was only once a year on the Old Testament great Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, that the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle the blood of sacrifice on the ark of the covenant, to deal with the anger of God against sin with the blood of sacrifice.

That blood of innocent beasts foreshadowed the covering, cleansing, saving atoning blood of Jesus. God preached this sermon of Jesus' saving sacrifice centuries in advance through those incredibly intricate details of the Old Testament rituals we find in the first few books of the Bible.

If you have ever struggled to get through the Old Testament book of *Leviticus*, you know that it's tough going. Many of the chapters read like a training manual for nuclear power plant workers. They give exhaustive instructions on how to live with something infinitely more powerful – and in a sense, infinitely more dangerous than atomic fusion—namely, how to live with the holy, Triune God.

There are instructions covering page after page about dozens of things that made God's Old Testament people unclean. There are rituals of ceremonial washings and cleansings.

There are detailed specifications for guilt offerings, sin offerings, fellowship offerings, grain offerings, whole burnt offerings. There are regulations about priestly vestments and orders of service.

All of these things spell out for God's Old Testament people the rules for living close to the true God, whom the Bible calls “*a consuming fire*” (Deuteronomy 4:24, Hebrews 12:29).

Now a pamphlet on how to survive a nuclear accident may be a dull read for your summer vacation, but it's absolutely riveting and you savor every word of it if you read it while sitting next to a vibrating nuclear reactor and you would rather not glow in the dark.

You see, all the ceremonies, sacrifices and cleansings of the Old Testament all foreshadowed the one and only decontamination process from sin God has provided – “**the blood of Jesus Christ his Son purifies us from all sin**” (1 John 1:7).

The blood of Christ alone makes it possible for us to come into the presence of a holy God without getting hurt. The blood of Christ alone rips open **the veil** and gets us through to God. Only Christ's sacrifice tears down the wall and introduces us to God, not as our enemy, not as our judge, but as our dear Father.

By Jesus' 'once for all' sacrifice as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – He has made possible a closeness with God that could otherwise have never been.

In the Old Testament, Israelites who touched the sacred ark of the covenant fell down dead. But people who touched Jesus Christ – God Himself come in the flesh – came away healed. And people whom **HE** touched came back to life.

To Jews who were even afraid to pronounce that special name of the LORD we spell in all capital letters, to them Jesus taught a new way of talking to God – **Our Father in Heaven.**

This is what the curtain veil being ripped open at Jesus' death is all about, the removal of the curtain that had blocked the way to God.

Relationships break down when, as we say, something has come between us, when we can no longer get through. How do we prodigal sons and daughters of the Father get through to God, get home to God when our sin blocks the way?

We can't tear down that curtain. But Christ can. And Christ did. "**Once for all,**" says the Bible. No more sacrifices are called for. No more smoking altars and dying lambs to foreshadow the Lamb of God—His only Son. For on that Friday at the cross, the price of admission to the Father's presence is paid in full.

The temple curtain is torn wide open. The book of Romans helps us see the significance in chapter 5, where it says: "**Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, THROUGH WHOM WE HAVE GAINED ACCESS BY FAITH INTO THIS GRACE IN WHICH WE NOW STAND**" (5:2). Now the book of Hebrews says we can "**draw near to God,**" (10:22)

On account of Jesus, nothing stands before you and God. Through Jesus' sacrifice nothing stands in the way of that relationship anymore. The way to eternal life stands wide open.

Each year on this Friday we call good, we gather together in church, drape the altar in black and soberly, silently pause to hear it retold.

We know from the pages of the Old Testament what this all means. It means we are forgiven, pardoned, justified, redeemed, reconciled by the One who did for us what

we could never do for ourselves. For us who struggle with the sin in us and around us, the message is as new and as good as ever.

But if we have become desensitized to our sin, if we fail to believe what God says about the severity of our sin, if we fail to see the dreadful price of our sin upon that cross, then will we think less of what Jesus has done for us and find the cross a great big bore.

But to those who believe God's Word and become more and more conscious of our sinful nature and our inability to save ourselves, to those who realize they have nothing to bring to God but an honest confession they have sinned against Him, to those who wonder if God could ever take them back in or let them in, to them, the answer is "Yes" and the good news of Good Friday is as sweet as ever.

The temple curtain torn, the way is open. Christ has broken down the barrier. The door is wide open! The Father is waiting and welcomes us home! Amen.

May your unfailing love rest upon us, O LORD, even as we put our hope in you. Amen.