



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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December 24, 2006
4th Sunday of Advent
Daniel 7:13,14
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Micah 5:2-5a
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 85
Second Lesson: Hebrews 10:5-10
Gospel: Luke 1:39-55

A Time for Sacrifice

In weeks leading up to the celebration of Christmas, it really is for many people a time for sacrifice. People sacrifice and sometimes they sacrifice so much that it takes them half the year to pay off the debt they incurred in order to buy the gifts to exchange with one another. Every year, at about this time of the year, you can read all those kinds of articles in the news magazines or in the paper. It is probably something that you did not think about much as a kid—how much your parents were sacrificing to put all those presents underneath the tree—but it is something that you probably recognized when you got older and started doing it yourself.

So this time of the year, right before Christmas, it is a time for sacrifice, a time to think about sacrifice, and in God's wisdom he comes to us in his Word and redirects our thoughts away from our sacrifices, which are always going to fall short, and points us to the great sacrifice that Christ came to the world for—the sacrifice that takes away our sins. As we think about a time for sacrifice, God directs us to the truth that our endless sacrifices fail to please God but that Jesus' sacrifice is once for all, and it makes us holy.

The whole premise about the Book of Hebrews is kind of interesting. It is written to Jews who knew the Old Testament Scriptures well. It is written to show that Jesus Christ is superior. He is superior to angels. He is superior to the High Priest. He is superior to anything that has come before because he is the One that makes us holy, and that is what he focuses on in this section that we read.

The section that I just read to you is really a discussion. You can think of it as the Son and the Father speaking to one another when the Son came to this world. The Son says to the Father, "*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God'*" (Hebrews 10:5-7). Then the writer gives his commentary on what Jesus said to the Father. He said, "*First he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them' (although the law required them to be made)*" (Hebrews 10:8). So if God wasn't pleased with them, why did God require sacrifices to be made over and over and over again? The blood of all these animals to be shed, all these drink offerings, all these grain offerings, all these things that the priests and Levites did in the temple day after day after day—why?

It's a way of reminding us that our sacrifices, our endless sacrifices that we would offer up to God, are not going to take away sin. They were all there to point ahead to the one sacrifice that would come that would be once for all. You might think, "We know that. We are Christians. We know that it is not what we do that saves us." Yet at times we are sure tempted to think that way. This time of the year especially it is prevalent in the world around us. You see so many red kettles, you see so many pleas for people to give to charity because humanly speaking, at this time of the year, many more people are thinking about giving. And unfortunately at times we think of giving with getting something in return. "If I give, then if there is a God up there, maybe he will take care of me more" is a thought that goes through the minds of people, I'm certain, from talking with them. We might not think that way, but sometimes we think because we serve God over and over within a congregation, we devote ourselves to this, we devote ourselves to that, we serve on this committee, we serve on that committee, we are present here, we are present there, God must certainly love us more because of all the things that we do for him.

It's not what we do for God. Nothing that we could do for God could pay for one of our sins. We would be completely lost and condemned if we were going to rely on our own activities and on our own actions, because our activities and actions are useless before our God. They can't pay for the things that separate us from our God. Even the glimpse of an idea somewhere in our minds for a fraction of a second condemns us to hell because it is a sin against our God.

Our God certainly wants us to live for him. Our God certainly enables us to live for him, but it isn't to take away our sin. It is to live in the joy of knowing that our sins have already been taken away. That is what the Messiah talks about with the Father—his willingness to carry out the work that he gave to him and his willingness to take on a body, even though from all eternity he is true God. "Yet this body you have prepared for me so that this body can be the one sacrifice, once for all,"—that is what all the other sacrifices and all the other rivers of blood pointed to—the blood of Christ which takes away our sins. This blood of Christ, Christ's perfect life and his death on the cross, makes us holy. *We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (Hebrews 10:10).

This reading reminds us of the great truth that the only reason Christ was born in Bethlehem was so that he could die on Calvary. The only reason the angels sang peace on earth to men is because Jesus would live and die in our place to bring peace between us and God. Therefore, since we have been made holy, the only reason we serve God and sing his praises, the only reason we direct ourselves toward him and give of our time and our talents and our treasures to serve him is because he has given us the greatest gift of all—he has taken away our sins. He has given us eternal life. And he gives us purpose and meaning as we live now. Not just endless sacrifices to try to make up for something, but now we offer the sacrifices of praise to God because he has already given us heaven through the life and death of Jesus Christ.

His sacrifice leads us to living for him. His sacrifice leads us to rejoicing that through something as simple as water and the Word, he works faith in a little child's heart. Our

God has blessed us in ways that are beyond our imagining and we are privileged to live in response to those blessings.