

**25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Mark 13:1-13; Hebrews 10:11-25**

I've had many jobs before I entered into the vocation of the Ministry of Word and Sacrament: bookstore clerk, video game repairman, hardwood floor sander, balloon animal guy... But, by far, my least favorite was working a Sear's tire department; not a good job for someone who hates having filth on his hands. Automotive shop filth is the highest level of filth which, even the special types of soap hardly wash off.

Sin presents us with a similar problem: how do we wash it off? Take a practical example. Someone hurts you badly, or you hurt someone else: sin against the neighbor. How is that broken relationship repaired? How can it really be atoned for? How can the wound really be mended? How can the broken trust truly be rebuilt? Even if one apologizes, confesses the wrong, asks forgiveness and receives it, is it really atoned for? I can't undo what I've done. Can I ever not feel as if the other person, or I myself, not hold it over the head of the offender? How can my conscience ever be at rest and confident?

How much more in the case of our offense against God? How can sin really be dealt with, washed away?

Modern society has tried to deal with this in a very simple way, to "un-sin" sin: covetousness is an economic virtue ("greed is good", said Ayn Rand), adultery is just me relieving my natural desires, stealing is just taking what the rich have unjustly taken from us, and ignoring the needs of the poor is just letting the lazy bums get what they deserve. But ignoring sin doesn't deal with it, and like cancer when it is ignored, it continues to ravage the human heart and our human societies even more ferociously.

Or maybe just try harder to be a better person, do good. But what certainty is there? How can I know I've done enough? How long do I have to be a good friend to my friend whom I've betrayed to prove that I'm better? How much good work, how many prayers does it take?

The disciples were walking past the Temple in Jerusalem, marveling at what a massive, beautiful work of human engineering it was; nothing like it within hundreds of miles. It was the place the LORD had instructed Israel to build in order that He, a holy God, might dwell amongst His sinful people. It was the meeting place of heaven and earth. Inside was the throne upon which the LORD ruled and governed Israel and the whole earth. And it provided a way to be forgiven: the sacrifices of animals were daily prayers of praises and pleas for forgiveness. Once a year on Yom Kippur, the high priest would enter into the Holy Place, then into a special room in the Holy Place called the Most Holy Place, separated from the rest by a massive, thick curtain. Going into the place in which the LORD was seated on His throne, the priest would sprinkle the blood of an

animal upon the ark, the Lord's throne, the propitiation, and pray for forgiveness for himself and all the people.

Finally, it seemed, there was a place for man to find true forgiveness. Yet, Jesus says this about the Temple: "Do you see these buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." (Mark 13:2)

Shock! The place where God meets man, the place where God's covenant people Israel can find atonement for their sins, the place where the prophets had spoken God would come to set up His kingdom forever on earth...will be completely demolished?! Disciples utterly shocked... So shocking a statement that this prediction of Jesus became the main charge against Him at His trial...

Why would God tear down the very thing He had built up? Does this not confound us, too: God taking away the very things He has given to us?

The book of Hebrews tells us that this was all a part of the LORD's plan; that the Law of Moses, the Temple, the priesthood...all of that was not God's final intention forever, but a promise-sign set up to point ahead to the real thing: His Son, Jesus who fulfilled the Law for us, is Himself God's final forever Priest between God and man, and that His own body is the true Temple of God. The real deal is here, so the old sign is no longer needed.

A simple illustration will do. If I were to invite you to my favorite Chinese restaurant and tell you I'd meet you there, and when you arrived I was standing out underneath the sign waiting for my food, you'd rightly think I'd lost my mind. Hopefully, you'd say, "Hey, the food's inside! Let's go!"

This is precisely what happens with Jesus coming. No matter how impressive the Temple was, and it really was an amazing place; no matter how many animals they slaughtered, how majestic the priests' vestments were... That's nothing compared to the real deal.

*"Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins..."* The Temple was just a temporary holdover. It actually did not take sins away, but covered them. God's plan was always to take the sins away forever. Jeremiah: *"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."* God's plan was to so fully abolish sins that even He doesn't remember them!

Here, finally is the answer we were looking for, the thing that doesn't just gloss over, cover up, suppress the wrongs we have done and done against us, but takes them away and forgets them forever!

*“But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”* (Heb. 10:12-14)

God has dealt with them already! So, we have full confidence... *“Therefore, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus”*, Jesus’ blood applied to us gives us permission to enter into God’s presence, as we have today, for wherever His Word is preached and Sacrament administered, there is Christ, and there is heaven itself on earth, there we have entered into the Holy Place.

*“...by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh”*, the image is the curtain in the Holy Place by which the priest entered into God’s presence: Jesus’ own flesh for us is that doorway opened to us that takes us straight into the Triune God’s presence without fear, because: *“we have a great priest over the house of God”*. He is our high priest who has made full atonement for all our sins and continually intercedes for us at His Father’s right hand for our benefit and blessing.

*“...let us drawn near with a true heart in full assurance, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”* With full assurance, because, though nothing man-made can wash the stain of sin off our hands and eyes and ears and minds, and hearts, the blood of Christ applied in Holy Baptism, and given in the Supper does.