

I.N.I.

Sunday after Ascension

June 5, 2011

Hebrews 9:24-28

In Christ Jesus, Our Ascended Mediator, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This Sunday is kind of a unique Sunday in the Church Year. It comes three days after the Ascension and one week before Pentecost. It can be called either the Sunday after Ascension or the Seventh Sunday of Easter. A couple of years ago our sermon text was from I Corinthians 15—the resurrection chapter so we called it the Seventh Sunday after Easter. Today our text has to do with Jesus' Ascension so we have called it the Sunday after Ascension.

It has an interesting place in the church year as a “bridge” position between these two great festivals---Easter and Pentecost.

So as we conclude our Easter season and look forward to the festival of the Holy Spirit we once again look back to Jesus' Ascension and look forward to His commission to all of us.

What was the last view those disciples had of their ascending Lord and Savior? Wasn't it His pierced hands lifted in blessing over them? How that sight must have stuck with them. When troubles arose, they needed only to recall His pierced hands stretched out over them in blessing. When temptations came, those same pierced hands were there, always ready to strengthen them. The same was true of sorrow and suffering, danger and even death. Jesus was not off in a secluded place in heaven, far away, unaware and unconcerned about them. He was holding His loving, living hands over them.

Do we think of those loving, pierced hands lifted up over us blessing us even to this day? Do we think of them when we face a serious illness or the loss of a Christian loved one? Do we think of them when we feel so lonely or feel trapped in a meaningless life?

Our text this morning describes Jesus as the High Priest who stretched out His arms on the cross and offered Himself as the sacrifice for all people.

We have entitled our theme:

THE DEMANDS OF THE NEW COVENANT FULFILLED BY CHRIST.

I: AS OUR HIGH PRIEST

II: AS OUR SACRIFICE

III: AS OUR MEDIATOR

IV: AS OUR JUDGE

Before we go on and investigate these 4 parts we must first review what the Old and New Covenant of God is.

A covenant means a promise, a binding agreement. Our confirmands last Sunday made a lifelong covenant with the Lord who had already made a lifelong binding agreement with them in their baptism. Unfortunately when man makes a covenant, a promise, it sometimes is broken. Look how many marriage covenants and promises lie broken cross our land—lives shattered, families in ruins, all because of broken lifelong promises. But when God makes a promise, a covenant, a binding agreement it can never be broken by Him. For God is faithful, true and unchanging.

Therefore in the beginning of time God gave to Adam and Eve a covenant, a promise that was as sure as if it were already completed. That promise was the promise of Savior to crush Satan's authority over man and to set mankind free from sin and death.

In order to keep this promise ever before the minds and eyes of His people the Israelites, He set

up the office of the High Priest and commanded sacrifices. In this way they were to keep alive the Old Covenant among all the people.

A special group of people were set aside to handle the ceremonies and sacrifices from the tribe of Levi. A Tabernacle was built which represented heaven and God's dwelling with them. In that Tabernacle there was a small room enclosed by a heavy thick curtain. The room was called the Holy of Holies. Only the High Priest could enter this room and only once a year. At this time the High Priest would take the blood of a sacrificed bull and goat and sprinkle it on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. This was a foreshadowing of the shedding of Jesus' blood upon the cross as full payment for our sins.

The people would stand outside of the temple area waiting while the High Priest went inside with the blood and offered it to God. The High Priest was their Go-between; their Mediator between them and their holy God. As we said earlier this was done to point to and keep in mind the promise of the Messiah who was to come, the Savior who would shed His blood for all. This offering of the High Priest had to be done year after year. We read in Heb. 10:1-4: **FOR THE LAW, HAVING A SHADOW OF THE GOOD THINGS TO COME, AND NOT THE VERY IMAGE OF THE THINGS, CAN NEVER WITH THESE SAME SACRIFICES, WHICH THEY OFFER CONTINUALLY YEAR BY YEAR, MAKE THOSE WHO APPROACH PERFECT. FOR THEN WOULD THEY NOT HAVE CEASED TO BE OFFERED? FOR THE WORSHIPERS, ONCE PURIFIED, WOULD HAVE HAD NO MORE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SINS. BUT IN THOSE SACRIFICES THERE IS A REMINDER OF SINS EVERY YEAR. FOR IT IS NOT POSSIBLE THAT THE BLOOD OF BULLS AND GOATS COULD TAKE AWAY SINS.**

We read again verse 24: **FOR CHRIST HAS NOT ENTERED THE HOLY PLACES MADE WITH HANDS, WHICH ARE COPIES OF THE TRUE, BUT INTO HEAVEN ITSELF, NOW TO APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR US;**

On Ascension day Jesus went into that Holy of Holies, heaven itself, in the very presence of God the Father fulfilling His role as our High Priest. He offered the one and only sacrifice that atones—His shed blood. He is both the High Priest and the Sacrifice all in one!

Notice those two very important little words—"for us." That's the Gospel—"He for us!" If we overlook those two little words, we miss the personal application of these verses. All that our High Priest Christ did, He did "for us!" He offered the Sacrifice for us---the Sacrifice of Himself upon the cross. We sing this truth in the Communion Hymn in these words: **"...offered was He for greatest and for least, Himself the victim and Himself the Priest."**

How often did He do this. We read: **NOT THAT HE SHOULD OFFER HIMSELF OFTEN, AS THE HIGH PRIEST ENTERS THE MOST HOLY PLACE EVERY YEAR WITH BLOOD OF ANOTHER -- HE THEN WOULD HAVE HAD TO SUFFER OFTEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD; BUT NOW, ONCE AT THE END OF THE AGES, HE HAS APPEARED TO PUT AWAY SIN BY THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF.**

Jesus fulfilled this Old Covenant once, once for all times, once for all people. And what happened to our sins? They have been **PUT AWAY**. This word means "annulled, completely abolished." Our sin is as far away as the east is from the west; cast into the depths of the sea, remembered by God no more.

But now that Christ has entered the Holy of Holies—heaven itself, what is He now doing? He is still our High Priest now working as our Mediator. He stands before God the Father and pleads our cause. We pray in Jesus' name and He takes our prayers to our Father in heaven. He stands

before His heavenly Father with His pierced hands, feet and side as prove of His payment for all of our sins.

Even as the management and the workers often hire mediators in order to avert strikes and conflicts, but to keep a harmonious relationship between the two, so also we have Jesus as our Mediator who has appeased God's wrath and brought peace between us and our Holy Father. Three times in Hebrews Jesus is called our Mediator: **BUT NOW HE HAS OBTAINED A MORE EXCELLENT MINISTRY, INASMUCH AS HE IS ALSO MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT, WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED ON BETTER PROMISES... AND FOR THIS REASON HE IS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT, BY MEANS OF DEATH, FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE TRANSGRESSIONS UNDER THE FIRST COVENANT, THAT THOSE WHO ARE CALLED MAY RECEIVE THE PROMISE OF THE ETERNAL INHERITANCE...TO JESUS THE MEDIATOR OF THE NEW COVENANT, AND TO THE BLOOD OF SPRINKLING THAT SPEAKS BETTER THINGS THAN *THAT OF ABEL*.**

But there is one more position Christ has to fill to satisfy the demands of the New Covenant and that is a Judge. We read vs. 27-28: **AND AS IT IS APPOINTED FOR MEN TO DIE ONCE, BUT AFTER THIS THE JUDGMENT, SO CHRIST WAS OFFERED ONCE TO BEAR THE SINS OF MANY. TO THOSE WHO EAGERLY WAIT FOR HIM HE WILL APPEAR A SECOND TIME, APART FROM SIN, FOR SALVATION.**

Even as all people's destinies—no matter how powerful, famous or rich—is to die and face the judgment, so also this is a certainty that Jesus died once, sacrificed Himself once for all sins for all people. This same High Priest, Sacrifice and Mediator shall then return as Judge.

From this destiny no person can escape. For the wages of sins is death and death has come upon all people for all have sinned. All will be gathered on that last great day of Judgment. Is that scary? Not for the Christian, the believer in Christ. For those who eagerly wait for Him, Jesus will appear as Judge to declare them to be free from all sins and perfect in His sight. In that day we shall be taken from this vale of tears, this land of sorrow, sickness, peril and pain; trials and temptations, death and disasters, and be lifted up; ascend also into the heavenly realms to live forever glorifying and praising our Savior.

May this ever be our hope and expectation. To look forward eagerly to that glorious day of salvation when our High Priest; our Sacrifice; our Mediator and our Judge will come with outstretched arms and say to us: **COME, YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.**

Amen.