

Both Sides of the Veil

Hebrews 7:28-8:6; 9:1-12

I've often thought that one of the tools a person needs to get into heaven is an imagination. Because if you can't imagine things that you don't know and haven't seen, it's going to be really hard to believe in Anyone different, anything bigger and better than what you already are and already know. So a lot of times in Bible, rather than telling us what to do, how to try harder, how to be better, God will simply show us a picture and through the picture he'll teach us what life is really like and where our place is in the big scheme of things.

So today I read you a passage from Hebrews where one of the Apostles remembered how God's people used to worship him in the desert way back when. And the point of the picture he drew was to teach us that our getting close to God is different, harder than you might think. Back when Moses and God's people were in the desert, they used to worship God in a huge compound that surrounded a much smaller tent. Not much bigger than the building we're in right now.

The point being that the Israelites, hundreds of thousands of them at a time, brought their sacrifices and offerings to a huge temple courtyard where the animals were slaughtered and the gifts were stored away, and then only the men, no women or children, were allowed into a somewhat smaller courtyard where they could see the outside of the Holy Tent and there they would pray because they were in the same area code as God and this was as close as an ordinary farmer or shepherd or soldier or even a king could ever be to Israel's God.

To tell the truth, they were excited to get that close, happy that a priest had accepted their sacrifice and pronounced them forgiven and right with God and let them in for a glimpse of the holy tent. But that's all they ever got. To actually enter the tent, you had to be a priest, from the tribe of Levi, from the family of Aaron. The priests were only allowed into the outer room, the first part of the Holy Place, where daily they trimmed a lampstand to make sure that there was always light in the tent where God lived.

And the priests kept a table in there with fresh bread daily and wine laid out as if God might invite someone to dinner at any moment. The table was always set by the priests daily. But that is as far, that was as close as they ever got to the God they believed lived in that tent. Because beyond that table and the lampstand and whatever other furniture was another veil, a curtain into which no one ever went except the chief priest, the head of Aaron's family once a year, carrying a bowl of blood from one of the sacrifices and a censer with incense.

Only one man, once a year got to see the Ark of the Covenant, the great gold box that held the manna, and Aaron's staff and the stone tablets on which the commandments were carved. Only the high priest could step in between the two great carved angels and pour a dollop of blood into a little tray that was called the mercy seat. And he would pray over the blood that God would

forgive his people all the foolish and wicked things they'd done for another year. And he would clean the tray, leave the ark and tell the people the good news. Forgiveness all around!

That is the picture God wanted you to see today. But where is your imagination? That table God kept all those years, bread and wine, new each day waiting for dinner guests? You're looking at it! The Last Supper was our invite into the outer room of the Holy Place, our invite to become God's priests in the last days, men, women and children all, allowed into the company of Christ to share the meal God kept for us through all those centuries the world waited for Christ.

And if that's where we are right now, what about that second room behind the curtain, with ark full of things that speak of power and wonders and miracles, bread that floated down from heaven to feed God's people in the desert, Aaron's walking stick which one day sprouted leaves as if it were a living tree, the tablets with the commandments that God himself had carved into stone after Moses had busted the first copy.

And most importantly of all, a human high priest presenting a sacrifice which buys us the forgiveness which gets us within sight, within earshot of a holy God. The second room is a picture of heaven and the point of the picture is that, once we give our lives to Christ, we're close, we're forgiven, God gives us a status as children and priests that none of us deserve, but all of us can have, simply because we belong to Christ.

It's no accident that now in the last days, all over the world, there are rooms like this, centered around a table, where men, women, and children like us, approach God and share at the table that used to be out of reach and out of sight. And one day soon we will all gather in that second room beyond the veil where Christ and the angels and power and wonders and miracles live.

The Holy of Holies was a picture of heaven and the message of this table is that we are very, very close, if only we'll have the imagination to believe it.