

An Offering God Wants

Psalm 40:1-8; Hebrews 10:1-10

With this morning's Scripture Lesson, we are turning into the home stretch of the the book of Hebrews. And, this far in, I wouldn't blame you for beginning to think that our study in Hebrews has taken us out into the weeds, because our author whose name we don't even know, has taken us on a tour of Old Testament passages, introduced us to Old Testament characters, and, best of all, led us into the Old Testament tabernacle for a detailed contemplation of Old Testament ritual, and I hope you've all had as much fun as I have working through the details.

But the question we ought to be asking ourselves is "Why? Why is he making us do this?" And the answer, I think, is that, when he wrote his letter, our author was confronted by Christians who, like Christians today, imagined that becoming a disciple of Jesus was about winning, about fixing and improving ourselves and becoming so masterful as to be loved and admired by God and man. It was an attitude they would have learned from the Pharisees, like the guy in Jesus' parable from Luke 18 who comes before the Almighty and announces how much he's prayed and fasted and given and all the rest. Jesus adds that this guy never got forgiven because he never imagined he'd done anything wrong. He forgot to ask!

And so our author has told us story after story, taught us lesson after lesson about how wrong we all are when we first approach God. We hear about Abraham and Sarah struggling to trust God for the promise, a child they couldn't have without God's help, how Moses descended from the summit on Sinai only to struggle for decades on the desert floor and never quite get to where he taught the people to go, about Rehab, the woman who somehow managed to survive the Jericho judgment even though there's absolutely nothing in her resume to show that she was anyone God would ever love or approve.

And then there's the rituals, animals shedding blood before anyone gets near God, water to wash before meals, before worship, when unsure, when in doubt wash, wash, wash! Scarlet wool in the tabernacle wall in case you forget about the blood, hyssop from the swamp grass dipped again in guess what? Blood! Blood to cover those sins too raw and too wrong for the rest of the pretty rituals to address, all over the doors at Passover, all over David's sorry, tangled up life.

Forty five books written over fourteen hundred years, all designed to warn us that nobody gets home, nobody is safe, nobody is right unless God provides a sacrifice to stand between us and what we deserve and what will become of us unless God gets in the game. And today we finally turn the corner and we're allowed to see the key that transcends all the sad stories of human failure, all the bloody, scary, repetitive rituals that warn against the judgment we all want to make believe isn't coming.

Our passage says, "*So it is that when Christ came into the world he said, 'Sacrifice and offerings you have not desired, but a body you've prepared for me. Burnt offerings and sin offerings*

you've not wanted, nor have they pleased you. But I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'

Now the first confusing feature of this passage is that Christ never did directly say that. This is a stanza from Psalm 40 which was sung by David a thousand years before Christ. Now at our Upper Room Last Supper service the last two years, we've explored the notion that many of the psalms of David were prophecies looking forward to Christ, that God ordered David's experiences and inspired David's prayers so that they actually end up being about Christ.

So the question is, "What did David discover as he sang Psalm 40 that allowed him to get past blood and water and scarlet wool and hyssop?" And the answer is, I think, that he had stumbled into sins for which none of the rituals taught by Moses would ever atone. Which was strange because David was a good man. He had loved and trusted and obeyed God from the time he roamed the hills with his father's sheep in Bethlehem. He was sincere and devout, good and gifted and yet somehow he threw all that away on an escapade that led him into scandal and corruption and worse.

So nothing in the Law of Moses would sort out what David had done, which is why he sings to God, "*Sacrifice and offerings you have not desired...*". The Law taught that David was toast, but incredibly God still wanted David. And there was nothing just about it. David deserved to die, but God let him live, all justice aside. So David only has one option left to take. "*You gave me a body,*" David says to God. "*So here I am! Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as is written of me in the scroll of the book.*"

We read here and in Psalm 139, verse 16, that David was inspired to know that God has a book in heaven in which all our life stories are written. And David knew that his life story was about him serving God, so all he could do in the face of his failure was to keep serving God even as the trouble of what he had done rippled out through his family and into the entire kingdom. He couldn't fix his mess but he could give himself to God and let God sort through what could be redeemed from the heartbreak and the trouble he caused.

Now what David sings about owing and giving his life to God becomes about Christ in two ways. First, indirectly, there's the matter of justice. Guilty sinners aren't allowed to simply trade their own lives to God as some kind of atonement for whatever it is they think they've done wrong. To attempt that is to defy the whole message of the Old Testament. Our sins are such that nothing we could do or give would ever atone for them. Someone else must die for the heartbreak and trouble each of us cause. Neither David's obedience nor his death would atone for his sin.

So David's casting about for a way to express his gratitude to God also becomes an explanation as to how David got forgiven in the first place. Because in David's distant future, there will come a person about whom it is written in God's scroll, "*Behold, I have come to do your will, O God.*" And that person is Jesus, who like David would note that ritual offerings and sacrifices

and burnt offerings and sin offerings weren't enough to buy any of us the forgiveness we'll need from God before we're through.

So the author to the Hebrews is inspired to see Jesus singing to the Father the same song David sang, "*Sacrifice and offerings you've not desired, but a body you've given me...Behold, it is written of me in the book, I have come to do your will, O God!*" David gave his life to God because he was in a fix and had nothing else to offer God anyway. Jesus gave his life to his Father because we were in a fix and God wanted to be just and show us compassion without one violating the other.

So Christ had to die for all the trouble and heartbreak that ripples out from all our lives. No other sacrifice was big enough and good enough to redeem all that trouble. And David taught us what to do in the face of such kindness and mercy from the Judge who had us all dead to rights. The only answer for it is to give ourselves to the One who loved us, to serve him, and let him form us into people whose affection and energy and ideas and resources and sacrifices all work together to redeem under God what sin has broken and ruined.