

### Call to Worship

God alone is our hope and salvation. **God alone is our peace and security.**

For not by finding and following the right rules or rituals are we made right with God. **Not by entering the right doors and espousing the right dogmas are we able to approach God.**

But it is by God's mercy made known in Jesus Christ that our estrangement with God is healed.

**We may enter with confidence into fullness of fellowship and joy with God who loves us.**

Let us offer praise and thanksgiving; let us worship together.

### Prayer of Invocation

**Creator God, in the chaos of our lives you touch us with moments of peace, assuring us of your nearness. When our eyes are clouded by evidences of despair, decline and decay on our planet, you hold before us in Jesus Christ, a vision of hope for a new world yet to come. Turn our eyes toward Jesus, and our hearts to thanksgiving, we pray. Amen.**

### The Word Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-22

Every priest stands every day serving and offering the same sacrifices over and over, sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when this priest offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right side of God. **Since then, he's waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for his feet, because he perfected the people who are being made holy with one offering for all time.**

Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, and we have a great high priest over God's house. **Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water.**

### Living the Word

Sixteen years ago, Bob and I each lost our fathers six weeks apart; eight years ago, we each lost our others three months apart. Losing our parents at about the same times brought both families around the family table to share in waiting, discussions, reminiscing and meals. At the Hamblin table it was shared that most of their lives had happened around that same table. Meals, homework, cribbage games, and many conversations: it was the family gathering place.

In a dining room open to both kitchen and living room, it was almost always occupied by family, friends or neighbors, as everyone knew that the coffee pot was always on. Often under the table were the family's cat or dog and all sized feet in muddy barn boots. Always, the cake of the day or the snack of the hour sat in a bowl, offered and passed as people arrived.

The Pearson family table was similar in that there were always extras beside the family at meals: extra hired hands, church families – often the Pastor's family, foreign students from the college, and cousins. But here the animals and muddy boots were left outside. Just the difference in family customs...Yet here too, there was always food to be shared according to the hour of the day and the hunger of the crowd.

Different, slower played card games were shared at this table, accompanied with time between turns to catch up on each other's lives. This table was moved from the farm house, to a new house in town, and then to the twin home and then to the two-bedroom apartment. But it was always the gathering place for all who came.

Interesting how a simple object, a wood table, can have so much meaning and memories to people. Another simple object that had meaning to me as I grew up was a yard stick. If mom went for the yard stick – it meant that someone was in trouble.

Not often, and I actually only remember a couple times for myself, but with five children, some more naughty than others – I saw mom go for the yard stick enough times to shutter at the thought of it. Fortunate for us, mom didn't like using it, so it was one swat, with more shame than pain inflicted. Even so that simple object had a special meaning all of its own...

Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, Thomas Long gives us these thoughts: "The congregation is basically tired and discouraged – tired of trying to live the Christian life in a culture that offers no support for it and discouraged about the way evil seems to persist in the world.

As a result, the congregation has begun to question the value of being followers of Christ. Attendance at worship has begun to falter, zeal for mission has waned, and the kind of congregational life that is rich with love and compassion has begun to dissipate. The preacher who hopes to revive his congregation's spirit, does not think they need a flashy leadership gimmick or razzle-dazzle in worship. Astonishingly, what they need the preacher believes, is a clearer understanding of Christ."

This could be written about many congregations today, but it was said about the writer of Hebrews from 2000 years ago when he wrote today's text for his congregation and now for us to know. Scholars are unsure as to who wrote to letter to the Hebrews, possibly Paul, or Apollos, one of the other 'Followers of the Way' as the first Christians called themselves. But as it is addressed to the Hebrews, we know that these were a group of the ancient faith, now getting to know and understand Christ and what his life meant. For us it can do the same thing as we explore its meaning for us today.

In the excerpt of the letter that we read the writer wants his readers to know for certain what Christ has done in his death on the cross is a 'once for all' sacrifice that frees people, not only from their debts of sins, but also from the ritual sacrifices that once surrounded them. What is presented in this scripture is an invitation for a community to be organized in a 'new and living way'(verse 20), not caught up in the rehearsal of an 'evil conscience'(verse 22).

The Hebrew people had been given strict rules as to specifically what and how they were to 'pay' for their sins with animal sacrifices brought to the temple to be slaughtered at the altar. Jesus changed all of that by giving his life blood for the forgiveness of all.

I personally am not a 'blood' person. When I come to visit you at the hospital, I will be glad to pray all you want, if you ask me, but I do not need to see your surgeries. God has given that gift to people who become nurses and doctors, but not so much to me. I won't pass out or anything, and I have bandaged my share of children's cuts, but it just isn't my strong suit.

So it is with the hymns that emphasize the blood. If someone starts to sing "There is power, power, wonder working power in the blood of the lamb," I literally see red. A number of the old hymns have

blood in them and we can still appreciate them, working to accept the understanding of the blood within them.

But when I consider that all of the lamb's blood on the altar has been washed away by the final sacrifice of Christ, who has become the image of the lamb of God, I get what the hymn is telling me. If you are like me, then in the remembrance of Christ which is Holy Communion, the cup becomes a pouring out of Jesus life for me. Jesus presented this to us as a meal, so we can be fed by it, not turned off or afraid of it.

Technically the 'altar' is no longer used – that was part of the sacrifice table for the animals. Jesus was the final sacrifice, so there is no longer the need for a sacrificial altar. For me it is a worship table or Communion table, a table that brings us together in Christ. Many will still call it an altar and that is OK and not wrong, but for me that imagery is not how I understand it.

Jesus' sacrifice changed not only the way people thought of sacrifices to God, but also how they ordered their lives. They no longer had to go to the temple armed with their lambs or doves to be used in the sacrifice as a penance for their sins. Like them it is difficult for us to understand how we can be forgiven so easily, without having to pay God for that gift, when we as humans know how hard it is to forgive each other.

Elizabeth Forney, a Presbyterian Minister in Clarksville, Tennessee gives this example: "Imagine the humble farmer prior to the advent of electricity or the steam engine. Time and energy that used to be spent behind the plow working by hand and lamplight is freed up, thanks to new sources of power. Far larger fields can be developed, as the day offers more possibilities than ever before. The same is true with the in-breaking of Christ into human history. Old patterns of living are broken, and fresh possibilities to heed the invitation of the living God summon the faithful to [a changed] identity."

The writer of Hebrews quotes Mark who ends his narrative with Jesus ascending to heaven to sit at the right hand of God. The footstool is also used in other places in scriptures to describe God settled in to wait on the coming of the kingdom. There is a whole other sermon here in that place of honor, next to God, relaxing with your feet up to wait for the enemies to be conquered. Jesus had done his work for us and waits for us to accomplish the Kingdom of God.

Well that is easy, all we have to do is love and forgive our enemies as Jesus taught us and then the final day will come. Then Jesus will take his feet off the stool and come again to us; whatever that might mean! We are living in that time between Jesus' victory over the powers of sin and death and the final victory when the enemies will be the footstool. The war has already been won, but there are still some skirmishes that are unfinished.

Another way of saying it is that Jesus' particular sacrifice has transformed those who can believe, into people who are now able to follow what God would have us do. We live in sanctified grace, meaning we live our lives differently because we know we are no longer under the rule of our sin, but have chosen to follow the lead of God.

This first means that we can be confident in what we do as we allow God to lead. Through Jesus we are washed pure and we symbolize this through our baptism. So as baptized and forgiven people, we need not be disabled by guilt or fear, but can live in the assurance that we are free to be who God calls us to be.

There need not be fear in the mission work we do for others in this community. Churches working together have made the shelter next door possible. Now working together, a men's halfway house is finally being ready and fit for drug rehab after jail time.

The new bank owners of the former People's Bank were really confused when they called me to ask what position I held with the Spider Lake Church. I then explained that the bank account is through the Spider Lake Church, I, the pastor of HUMC am the treasurer and Ruby's monthly distribution is held at the Wesleyan Church.

This is what people can do together, when they have the confidence to live free from the guilt or fear. Once again if we can think beyond ourselves, we can come together in situations we have never imagined before to accomplish God's work and Jesus' goal of loving each other.

Second, when we are sanctified, we live in hope. So even when we have disadvantages and difficulties in life, we need to be aware that we are to be faithful as God is faithful until the time comes when the final victory comes. Third we are invited to live this sanctified life in community. In verse 19, the writer refers to the friends entering the sanctuary together, and as friends we are expected to live in peace with each other.

Jesus had made his sacrifice, and that sacrifice cannot be repeated nor does it need to be. There is something unrepeatable about any great work. Think of the works of Beethoven or Monet, Einstein or Benjamin Franklin. Creation does continue, but those names have meaning for us because of the one-time, great works they and many others have given us.

And Jesus' work was the greatest because it was done with perfection, in his life examples and teachings and through the sacrifice of his death. Still it is difficult for us to accept the freedom from our own sin until we begin to live into the calling that God has for us. The good news: we continue to go into this together.

The yard stick may have been the measure of my sins when I was young, but eventually I got beyond the stick and only had my shame to consider. Yet even that is washed away through our understanding of God's unconditional love, God's grace for us. Because of Jesus sacrifice for us, we can come to the table. It is not a table asking for a blood offering, but a table offering us a feast of forgiveness for our sins.

Elizabeth Forney says this: "Life in Christian Community summons us to acknowledge the unfinished nature of what God has set in motion. Our transformation personally and communally is not yet complete. Yes, Christ's sacrifice has opened the gates of heaven for all to enter, but the fullness of the kingdom of God has not yet been revealed.

We are a people who live in the dance of the already-but-not-yet, and to dwell in that place requires much encouragement. It is terribly easy to lose hope and focus in the face of a reality that seems to suggest that not much is different, despite Christ's having walked among us. This is yet another reason for us to gather and to testify to one another what we have seen and heard of God. It is also a reason for the Christian community to live out even more passionately the grace we have been shown in Christ."

Verse 22 commissions us: "Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water."

As for the family tables: I realized as I considered them that they may not still be the actual same tables we began with in either location, but the placement of one is still where it has been for forty years and the other table location has changed many times, but it is still the family table.

Thanksgiving Feasts will be served around many tables next week. For my family, the tables are not the ones Bob and I grew up at, the locations are different, and we have our own family table that our children, grandchildren, friends and neighbors stop by regularly. Games are played there; homework is done there and often there are muddy boots and two dogs under the table.

The church has another kind of family table, this one is where, through Holy Communion, we remember that Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. The Worship Table and the Blood.

Then on Thanksgiving Day as you sit at your table in thanksgiving, let us be like Christ as we sit and feast and await the final triumph of time. Until then you can know that Jesus is at every feast, at every table when he is invited in... "Come Lord Jesus, be our guest." Amen.