

He Partook of Flesh and Blood

Hebrews 2:14-18

Sunday, July 24, 2022 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction

Today, in this series of worship services that involves Christmas in July, I wanted to reflect on the participation of Jesus in terms of what He did for us. Now, before I say anything more, let me apologize for the clumsy title of this message. In seminary we were taught to try to make the sermon titles clever and appealing, but I never did very well at that, and this title sounds like an old, gothic, Vincent Price horror movie. Obviously, it is not, but about the coming of Jesus to be our propitiation, a strange word that holds great importance in the New Testament. Let's take a look at the passage in its immediate context and then focus on the key word in verse seventeen.

- Set the stage-verse by verse

The passage is in the Book of Hebrews, second only to Revelation in the number of Old Testament quotes and allusions. The author (Paul?) was someone well versed in Judaism writing to people with a Jewish background who were at risk of losing home, family, community and even identity by choosing to follow Jesus as Messiah. The point of the Book is that Christ is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament and even if they pay a great price by being rejected and declared ostracized by God, they are in fact following the will of God and the fulfillment of Sacred Scripture.

The passage itself is full of insight. Jesus takes on flesh and blood, like the children He claims, in order that through death He might destroy the devil, who through death enslaved the human race through the fear of death. That speaks to everyone in the world. He does not "give aid" or come and join the angels but rather to people, the seed of Abraham. His goal is to be a merciful and faithful High Priest, aid those who are tempted and to make propitiation. There's the key word that is so obscure.

The High Priest who makes propitiation

the tragedy of entering the human race. cf. Arwen of the Lord of the Rings, she chose a human life.

There are two strange theological words that tie into our reflection today; they are Expiation and Propitiation. Expiation takes care of the letter of the Law regarding crime and punishment.

Propitiation does more. Expiation fulfills the just punishment of the Law but may not satisfy the aggrieved victim and family. Like the sordid story of the woman who murdered her friend in a "moment of insanity" over an argument about an affair. The Law was satisfied with temporary insanity. The family of the victim and much of the community felt otherwise. They were, and probably are, convinced that justice was not served even though the letter of the law was met.

That's expiation but not propitiation in that it met the proper, technically, legal response but the bitter taste of injustice remained. Propitiation does both, it meets the letter of the Law but also provides the satisfaction that justice has indeed been served.

Propitiation in Romans, the mercy seat

Found only four times in the New Testament, propitiation ties the life, death and resurrection of Jesus with one of the most sacred of Old Testament events. It is in this section (Romans 3:22b-26):

“For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” “Propitiation” is the New Testament word for the Old Testament “mercy seat”, the covering of the Ark of the Covenant upon which the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificed animal for the sins of the people against other people, all of which is seen by God. The concept remains but it is fulfilled in Christ. God is both just and merciful, and we are forever in the grace of Christ.

- Application

Have kindness and patience on charity cases because we are all charity cases. I remembered yesterday an episode from the C.S. Lewis classic *The Great Divorce*, in which he imagined a conversation between a denizen of hell, who demanded only his rights, and someone in heaven who didn't deserve to be there. "I don't need no bleeding charity," claimed the proud man from hell. To this the citizen of heaven responded "Yes you do. Ask for the bleeding charity."

- Conclusion

Christ partook of flesh and blood to be the person who makes God the Father both the wrathful God of justice, who remembers every wrong committed from one human to another, to the forgiving God who is faithful and just to forgive us from sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He is the equivalent to, and the final application of blood on the mercy seat, forever reminding us to be kind to charity cases, for we are charity cases ourselves. He partook of flesh and blood, that we might partake of the Divine Nature, and become like the Savior we serve.