

The Fourth Sunday In Advent (Christmas Eve)	(December 23, 24, 2018)	1768
O. T. Lesson: Micah 5:2-5a		Service of the Word: p. 38
Epistle: Hebrews 10:5-10		58
Gospel: Luke 1:39-55		Psalm 96
Text: Hebrews 10:1-10		42
Theme: <u>Once For All Christ Came.</u>		43
I. Once for all to sacrifice.		"Great O Antiphons"
II. Once for all to do God's will.		
III. Once for all to make us holy.		

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come!

Hebrews 10:1-10

The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God.'"

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Heavenly Father, sanctify us through your truth; your word is truth! Amen.

Dear friends, redeemed by Christ's sacrifice once for all,

One of the most frustrating things about life is the repetition we go through. The car breaks down. We get it fixed. Two weeks later it breaks down again. We get it fixed again only to wonder: when will it break down again? If only we could get it fixed once and for all.

In the summer time we mow the lawn. Five days later we mow the lawn again. It's a never-ending process. If only we could mow the lawn once and for all.

This time of year we're having fun with our snow shovels. We get the drive-way cleared, only until the next storm comes through, or the wind drifts it shut again. If only we could clear the driveway once and for all.

"Once and for all" is a common phrase, but it doesn't very well describe the way we do things, does it? If we look at our daily routine, we tend to be "again-and-again" type people just like everyone else. The reason for this is that we lack real and lasting solutions.

One of the favorite expressions of the writer to the Hebrews is "Once for all." He

doesn't use this expression to describe our work, but rather the work of Christ. What he did was once for all, the true, the lasting solution. That's why we celebrate Christmas. Once For All Christ Came. Once for all to sacrifice. Once for all to do God's will. Once for all to make us holy.

Again-and-again type people, not getting any further ahead; not really accomplishing anything, or getting anywhere. That describes the Old Testament Israelites in their worship practices. Again-and-again describes their sacrifices. The priests would slaughter animal after animal, shed the blood, cut up the carcass and burn the appropriate portions on the altar as a fragrant offering to the Lord. The people, the worshippers, would watch these sacrifices take place again and again. Each day was to begin with the sacrifice of a lamb in the morning. Each day was to end with the sacrifice of a lamb in the evening. And these daily sacrifices culminated in the sacrifice on the great Day of Atonement every year when bulls and goats were sacrificed and their blood sprinkled before the Lord on the mercy seat and the altar. Day after day, year after year, this same cycle of sacrifices was repeated, endlessly, for centuries. And that's not even to mention the countless other sacrifices brought by individuals, offerings of various types--guilt offerings, sin offerings, fellowship offerings, thank offerings--all prescribed and commanded by God. Again and again. There seemed to be no end to these sacrifices.

We might be tempted to say, "What a waste of animals. What a waste of time and effort." But God had commanded these sacrifices to be made, and with good reason. The people were sinful, and sinful people cannot stand in the presence of God. Sin must first be taken away. These constant and countless sacrifices were to impress upon the people that the only way they could come into fellowship with God and stand acceptable before him was through sacrifice, through the shedding of blood for their sins.

But it was quite apparent that these many sacrifices of animals were not the real and final answer for sin, because they always had to be offered again and again. Animal sacrifices made no one perfect in God's sight. In and of themselves, animal sacrifices brought no one to the goal of forgiveness of sin and fellowship with God. If they had, they would not have had to be repeated endlessly. If surgery is successful, it need not be repeated over and over again.

Instead of taking away sin, these sacrifices emphasized sin, reminded the people of their guilt and led them to the conclusion, "It is impossible for the blood of animals to take away sins. But that's what we need--to have our sins taken away--taken away completely--once for all." These sacrifices pointed the people ahead to the real sacrifice--Christ. "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

But once for all Christ came. He came once for all as our high priest to offer a sacrifice--one sacrifice. That sacrifice was himself on the cross. "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." How many striking similarities there are between the Old Testament animal sacrifices and Christ. The victims were to be males, with no defects, picturing the perfection of Christ, "a lamb

without blemish or defect." The blood was shed, just like Christ's was on the cross. But the difference was that Christ's sacrifice was once for all. It was truly efficacious, truly effective, truly took away all sins of all people, as John the Baptist proclaimed of Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

Sometimes people complain that the Old Testament sacrifices were cruel and repulsive. But we need to remember that God commanded these sacrifices to impress upon the people the seriousness of their sin. Sin deserves death, the shedding of the life-blood. That should lead us to a great appreciation of our Savior, who offered that sacrifice of himself, once for all. For something truly cruel and repulsive, the place to look is on a hill called Calvary, on a cross, where we see the innocent Son of God suffering what we deserve. But that does not fill our hearts with disgust and anger, but with thanks and peace. What a great treasure we have in Christ! Especially during the holiday season we should keep in mind that one reason Christ was born. Once for all he came. Once for all to sacrifice.

In that sacrifice, finally sin was taken away. Finally the salvation of mankind was carried out. Finally God's saving will for this earth was done. Christ came once for all to do God's will. We have in these verses a beautiful conversation which Christ carried on with God the Father before entering our world, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. These verses are a quote from Psalm 40--timeless words of God the Son to God the Father. "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God.'"

When Christ humbled himself to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, he knew well what he was coming to this earth to do. He knew well what God desired and what he did not desire. God did not desire sacrifices or offerings. Those rivers of animal blood and mountains of animal carcasses were not what God really wanted, not what God really required. What God wanted and required was that to which those sacrifices pointed, the willing sacrifice of his own Son.

Christ says to God the Father, "A body you prepared for me." A body for the Messiah to be born on earth at Christmas, a body to live on earth, to die on earth; to lovingly, obediently, willingly, perfectly follow the Father's will to save sinful mankind. A Messiah who says, "Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God." A Messiah who in his home town of Nazareth read from the scroll of Isaiah and then proclaimed, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Wherever we unroll the scroll and look in the Old Testament, we find reference to the Son's willingness to carry out the Father's will. God's will was that his Son make full and final sacrifice for sin. And Christ agreed perfectly to that, even delighted in that. He was willing, even pleased to be born here on earth to die.

What boundless love for mankind! God the Father wills the salvation of sinners, and God the Son obediently submits to and carries out that will. This heavenly conversation between Christ and the Father is beautifully expressed in one of our Lenten hymns: "'Go forth, my Son,' the Father saith, 'and free men from the fear of death, from guilt and condemnation. The wrath and stripes are hard to bear, but by thy passion men shall share the fruit of thy salvation.' Then the Son's reply: 'Yea, Father, yea, most willingly I'll bear what thou commandest; my will conforms to thy decree, I do what thou demandest.' Then our response: 'O wondrous Love, what hast thou done! The Father

offers up his Son! The Son content, descendeth!" [TLH 142]

Once for all Christ came to do God's will. "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Christ came once for all to make us holy. In Christ we are without sin, spotless in God's eyes. Not one bit of contamination remains on us. Not one ounce of condemnation weighs us down. We are God's saints, made holy once for all by Christ.

It is only through Christ that we are holy. Nothing that we could ever do could make us acceptable to God. No amount of good-doing on our part can please and satisfy God. No amount of sacrifice on our part can take away the guilt of our sin and give us peace with God. Going to church doesn't make us acceptable or holy in God's sight. Praying doesn't, nor do our offerings make us holy, not any more than animal sacrifices made God's Old Testament people holy. Without Christ we could strive day after day, year after year, forever and forever, and never be acceptable to God in any way. But Christ made us holy once for all! He took away every sin we have ever committed, and every sin we will ever commit. What a treasure we have in him!

In our business world, people like to assure us, "We do the job right. Buy our product and we'll give you a guarantee" for a month, a year, or maybe even six or seven years. God's guarantee is forever. He did the job right. Once for all Christ was born; once for all to carry out our salvation. Let us rejoice this Christmas season, and in the new year, as we see that in this most crucial work of our salvation, God is more efficient than we; totally efficient, totally sufficient. In Christ he did it once for all!

Amen.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.