**Sermon Text**: Hebrews 10:11-25

**Occasion**: 26th Sunday after Pentecost, 17 Nov 2024

**Not Another Sacrifice**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

***14****For by a single offering [Christ] has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

***15****And the Holy Spirit…****17*** *adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”*

***18****Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.* (Hebrews 10)

Unless you have a case of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, you might find it hard to believe that Jesus Christ has perfected you for all time through faith. I’m sure we will all agree that none of us is perfect. Things that may come to mind reminding you that you haven’t achieved the pinnacle of perfection just yet. These can be big things or small things. Maybe you slipped up and forgot something you really had to do, or perhaps you caught yourself falling back into your most dreaded patterns of sin. These sorts of things tell us we are not perfect. We are sinners. But Jesus Christ has come into this world to save sinners (1 Tim 1:15). You know this. Christ came to offer himself on the cross to forgive sins. Therefore, Christ came to save you—and he already has saved you. The offering Christ made of himself on the cross was 2000 years ago. Satisfaction was made for your sins 2000 years ago, a satisfaction you receive in the here and now only through faith. Here and now, you are washed clean of your sins and are perfectly right with your God. Therefore, you can indeed say that you have been perfected for all time by Christ’s sacrifice as you are being sanctified through faith.

I think it is the “all time” thing which we stumble over. You are being sanctified, that is, being made holy; but you are not the holiest of holy versions of yourself just yet. That won’t come about until you are called out of your grave, your flesh is clothed with immortality, and enter bodily into the paradise to come. That takes place on the Last Day. Until then, your body and spirit need some work…which is why you have Christ’s sacrifice at the cross. Every time you find yourself falling short of what you need to do and who you need to be, you need to go back to the cross, that is, repent. Every time you find a fresh imperfection in your thoughts, words, or deeds, you need to go back to the cross. You need to go back to where forgiveness lies. The cross is where God remembers your sins and lawless deeds no more. And apart from the cross, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. This is because Christ has done it!

Christ has perfected for all time those who are being made holy by the blood of his cross! There is life eternal and complete forgiveness there. Apart from the cross, there can be no further sacrifice for sin because there is no other sacrifice under heaven which can forgive sins. Your money? Forget it. Sacrificing your worldly wealth will only get you worldly rewards. Your time? No, sacrificing your meager time in this world will not gain eternity. How about your own blood, sweat, and tears? Well, those lack the holiness found in Christ’s own blood, sweat, and tears which he sacrificed on your behalf to open the way of salvation for you. There remains no sacrifice you can offer for the forgiveness of sins. Nothing you have can make God love you.

Isn’t that great? Isn’t that wonderful? There is nothing you can do or give to make God love you. He already loves you. God already shared the most supreme love there is in the sacrifice of Christ (cf. John 15:13). There is no further offering of time, talents, or treasures that you must make because Christ has already accomplished salvation for you. There is no personal shaming, grieving, or self-flagellation you need to do. Christ died *while* you were still a sinner (Rom 5:8). When you were your worst, that is when Christ washed you from your sins and beckoned you to enter paradise. You do not have to do anything. You do not have to sacrifice anything. Christ has done it all for you and he has perfected you by preparing you for holiness. You don’t have to make yourself good enough for heaven; it is Christ’s job to make you good enough for heaven.

It used to be a common comment or claim in shows or movies that a character hoped someone would make it into heaven by being “good enough.” One show in particular is etched in my memory. It was called “My Name Is Earl” where the title character Earl tries to undo all the evil things he did in his past. At one point, he is at death’s door and Earl’s brother looks at a list of all the things Earl has accomplished and everything Earl had left to do, and says, “I hope you crossed off enough stuff to get into heaven.” That’s the general sense we get from the world around us: the only way to be saved is to save yourself.

That is also how we might feel from time to time, although maybe we don’t phrase it that way. Most of us in the Church, instead of focusing on all the good things we have done, will dwell on the stupid or wicked things we have done. We think of sins, sleights, times of indifference to pain and suffering around us. And we wonder, “How can I be saved? I have done all these horrible things. How can God possibly love me?” So, instead of looking to how we might earn heaven, we look to how we might have lost our place there. This is particularly worrying for anyone struggling with an addiction in the Church, where they keep returning to the thing they have sworn off time and time again. So, how can you—you who have such imperfections—be forgiven in God’s sight?

By the blood of Christ, how else? Only by the sacrifice of Christ crucified can you enter heaven. There is nothing you can do, no sacrifice you can offer to make God love you. He already loves you, which is why He sent His only begotten Son into the world so that you who believe in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). There is no longer any offering to make for sin. This includes your good works and even the lack of sinful works. There is nothing you can offer because you are already forgiven by Christ through faith. Christ died once for all (Heb 10:10)—for all sins, for all people, for all time. As long as you have Christ and cling to his sacrifice at the cross, then there is no sin which can bar you from him.

You aren’t perfect yet, but Christ perfects all those who believe in him so that they may become perfect in holiness. Nothing unclean can enter into God’s kingdom (Rev 21:27), which is exactly why Christ cleanses you with the forgiveness found in his blood. We are now able to draw near to the Father because Christ has sprinkled our hearts clean from an evil conscience and washed our bodies with the pure water of baptism (Heb 10:22). If you feel unclean—stained by sin and impure with imperfections—then return to the Lord. Return to the promise of your baptism and the promise of forgiveness at the cross of Christ. He is the only offering to forgive sin and he offers himself to you. By grasping onto him at his cross, there is nothing further you need to do for your salvation or forgiveness.

But we do need to be careful in our words. There is nothing you can do to receive salvation, but that doesn’t mean there is nothing left for you to do as a citizen of heaven. As the author of Hebrews says, “Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope,…consider how to stir one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together…” (Heb 10:23-25) Just because our good works and sacrifices cannot earn us a place in heaven does not mean those sorts of things have no place at all. It would be horrible for us to know that we have a spot in heaven and then lounge around watching the world burn, letting people down and not caring to love and support them in their lives.

For what are the sins that gave us moments of doubt concerning our salvation? The sins of which we are ashamed? Are not those sins the ones where we are actively harming or neglecting to help our neighbours inside and outside the Church? Why would we indulge in more sins once we have the promise of forgiveness for those same sins? That would be spitting upon the blood of Christ which just washed our hearts. The last thing we want to do is desecrate the most precious gift we have been given. We stand forgiven in Christ. Therefore, we should act as those who are forgiven.

We should be sympathetic to fellow sinners like us. We know the pain and anguish of doubting salvation; therefore, we should be encouraging one another in the promise of forgiveness. We should be sharing the hope of Christ to our brothers and sisters in the faith. Whatever problem or trial you are experiencing, Christ loves you. Christ has sacrificed himself for you, and he will lead you beside still waters for his name’s sake, even if that path leads through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:2-4). He will be with you.

As the Day draws near when we will see our Lord face to face, we cannot neglect to meet together—neglecting to love one another and build each other up in the faith. Love and support are and always will be what encourages us. How can we deprive one another of our encouragement? How can deprive one another of hearing, “Yes, my brother or sister, you may feel imperfect but I forgive you for any sin you have done against me. It is forgotten; and Christ our Lord remembers it no more either. He has perfected all those whom he is making holy, therefore, I will honour you as a saint just as he does.”

We will always thirst for words of forgiveness and assurance of salvation. Only when we cease to thirst for them should we be concerned about our spiritual health. Otherwise, we can rely on the promises of Christ, especially the promise that there remains no other offering for sin. Christ has died once for all and remembers our sins and lawless deeds no more. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.