

Good Friday
3 April 2015
Pr. Krueger
Matthew 27:50-51a

I fully imagine that for most pulpits this evening the focus and the message is upon Calvary, crucifixion and the cross. But God's Word before us this evening would give us a different focus. It takes us back to the holy city, the holy temple, and the Holy of Holies. And this is that Word from our God for this evening:

"Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold, the veil in the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom."

Now, because this is Christ Lutheran and because I am a Lutheran pastor, having heard that Word from our God, we are quite proper (and Lutheran) to ask: What does this mean?

- The veil-torn is our Father's tender invitation
- I. What does the veil-torn, mean?
 - II. But what does it mean for us?

Come join me in reviewing the architectural layout and it's meaning of that Holy Temple back there in that Holy City of Jerusalem. The largest part of that Holy Temple was the Courtyard of the Israelites, the laymen, if you will. That's where the laymen, laywomen and children would gather when Services were celebrated. Next came the Temple-proper; divided into two fairly large areas. The first being the Holy Place. There the clergy were allowed to go to offer sacrifices and prayers and they took turns. You'll recall that it was Zacharias' turn to burn incense in the Holy Place when the angel, Gabriel, appeared to him to announce the birth of his son, John. The next area, and the most important, was the Holy of Holies. That's where the Ark of the Covenant was, also known as the Mercy Seat. Only the High Priest could enter there, even look into there. And the High Priest could only enter once a year and only after sacrificial blood had been shed as a symbol for the forgiveness of sins for the High Priest, all the other priests and all of the people, themselves.

Have you begun to notice an architectural similarity between "their" Temple and "ours"? We call it the Nave, not the Courtyard of the believers. Nonetheless, here you gather to be a part of the worshipping people of God.

Then there is this area we call the Chancel, not the Holy Temple. But it is divided into two district spaces. Might we refer to these as the New Testament's counterparts to the Old Testament's Holy Place and Holy of Holies? For this evening, let's! Notice that, in most Services, the Officiating Pastor does not go up to the Altar, our Mercy Seat, until and after he has joined us in confessing sins and pronouncing God's forgiveness to us, for us and upon us!

But where is that veil? Could it be represented by the Communion Rail? But notice...it is 'open.' Or, to quote our text: torn in two. As an aside and a piece of our parish history: there is a wooden bar that was built to fit into that space, closing it off. Now, when we were building the Church, I told the architect to leave the Communion Rail "open." After all, we are New Testament people, not Old. But he prevailed, telling me that it would be very difficult to match the wood over the years. But that piece of wood has never been used; last time I saw it, it was gathering dust in the Sacristy. We are New Testament; the veil has been torn!

Interesting architectural excursus into the Old Testament with parallels into our New Testament "Temple." But now, the big: SO WHAT? And that is answered by repeating that original Lutheran question: "What does this mean" and then quickly adding "for us"! "What does this mean for us?"

I find it more than interesting that of all the Old Testament names used to address God, Father is rather absent. But when Jesus, the Veil-Tearer, taught His first disciples and us, His 21st century disciples, to address, talk to and pray to God, He said, "You begin by saying "Our Father"! Again, "what does this mean"...and..."what does this mean for us?" Your copy of The Small Catechism ought to help you, right? It supplies us with this explanation to the Introduction to The Lord's Prayer; to the "Our Father" Prayer.

"God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we might with all boldness and confidence, ask Him as dear children ask their dear father."

There you have it, children of our Heavenly Father, the "what does this mean for us"...the veil-torn is our Father's tender invitation. The once-and-for-all Blood of the Once-And-For-All Lamb has been sacrificed out there on that hill called Calvary. The veil is torn. We, part of the New Testament priesthood of all believers, have personal, individual and immediate access to the Mercy Seat.

But in that Explanation to the Lord's Prayer, be quick to notice how Our Father wants us to approach His Mercy Seat, approach Him! *"So that we may, with all boldness and confidence..."*

The hymnist hit it, sadly, right on the head: "Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, all because..."all because...there is a sad and sickening boldless. Eaves-drop in on some of our "bold-less" prayers: "Dear God, if you could...Almighty Lord, would you..." And on, and on, and on.

On more occasions that I care to remember, one or another of our three children would approach me with a broken toy, shove the shattered toy into my face, and boldly proclaim: "Daddy, fix it!" No matter that I was (and still am) "mechanically challenged"; no matter that I might have to stay up well-beyond my bedtime, no matter that I might have to enlist the help of one of our members... I was motivated because of that trusting phrase: "Daddy, fix it!"

Dear children of our Heavenly Father, when was the last time you took your broken body, your battered soul, your bruised relationship, your busted hopes and held them up into the face of your Father, and with His invited boldness, said to Him: "Daddy, fix it?" That veil-torn is His tender invitation for you to be so bold!

But not just boldness, also confidence. When any of our children brought me that broken toy, they went on with their lives because they were confident that I would fix it. Those of you who have visited me at our condo in Branson know that I have a metal plaque outside the front door. It reads, "Faith is not believing that God can, it is knowing that He will." That's confidence!

Listen to the writer to the Hebrews: "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus..let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance." And if that is not enough, listen to the admonition of James: "Yet ye have not because ye ask not."

The veil-torn; our Father's tender invitation. The veil is torn, the sleeve on the Father's robe is not. So reach up and grab ahold of it, giving it a full and faithful tug, saying: "Father, You promised!"

Thus saith the Lord. Amen.