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St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington  
17 April 2025

Sermon on Hebrews 10:15-25

Worship Theme:

**THE NEW COVENANT**

On Thursday of Holy Week, Jesus began to execute the terms of the New Covenant, which replaced the old one and was fundamentally different from it in every way. The old offers rewards in return for work; the new makes unconditional and lasting promises. The old will always leave us starving in our relationship with God; the new satisfies the deepest hunger of our soul. This is precisely why Jesus connected this new covenant with a special meal. To some, the Lord's Supper looks like a poor snack—a bite of bread, a sip of wine. But the followers of Christ understand that this holy food provides all the blessings of the new covenant.

Sermon Theme: “By the Body and Blood of Jesus”

1. These Have Been Forgiven
2. We Can Confidently Enter

How many times has it been now? That same stupid sin, over and over again. You promise yourself you won't. You tell your spouse, family, and friends, “I'm a changed person!” You make a deal with God, assuring him you'll never do it again, and if you do, he can punish you all he wants (though he won't need to worry about that, because it won't happen!). But then it does. In spite of everything you said to everyone, you do the sin anyway. And immediately you're horrified with yourself, sitting there in guilt and shame and disgust because of what you've just done, staring at the pieces of your broken promise shattered on the floor.

Have you been there before? I have. It's awful, it's horrible, it's the most dreadful feeling in the pit of your stomach and you feel like you're going to be sick because how could you possibly do that again after everything it ruined before? And the worst part? It's familiar. It's a familiar feeling, and even with such a small description, no one needs to use their imagination tonight; we've lived it. What can we say to our friends and family now? And how can we ever approach God again

I don't know all your sins and you don't know all mine, yet we both know that we both know exactly what this is like. But far worse is the fact that God does know what the sins are. And God tells us very clearly how he feels about these sins we've committed. *Lawless acts*, he calls them. Every time we sin, we break God's law and disobey him, which clearly means either we think God's law doesn't apply to us or we couldn't care less what it says because we're going to live our lives however we want and if that makes God upset, then that's his problem, not ours.

But we both know that's not true. It is your problem, and it is mine too. Because of the things we have done and the choices we have made, we should have nothing BUT problems for the rest of our days and for all eternity too! We shouldn't have anyone who loves us anymore, we shouldn't have anything good in our lives, and we shouldn't be taken care of, protected, or provided for anymore.

We should be banished from the goodness of God, alone and forsaken forever.

And isn't it amazing how often those truths don't seem to affect us at all. So much doesn't change in our lives – we just keep doing the same dumb things over and over again! We act as if since we've heard these things a thousand times before, they don't matter as much as they used to. These words have lost their edge, and the knife doesn't cut quite as deeply anymore. God's Law doesn't bother us. We know there's always good news coming, so we endure the "rough part" of the sermon when we talk about how bad sin is, just waiting for the pastor to get to the part where he says, "Yes that's all terrible, but Jesus makes it better!"

But what if that didn't happen. What if no pastor ever got to that point? What if our church services were designed apart from the goodness and grace of God? What if we spent time reflecting on our sins, even taking a few minutes to confess them to God...but then were just left hanging, waiting. No pronouncement of forgiveness. No word of peace. No guarantee from God that our relationship with him is restored again. No hope whatsoever unless and until we would change our ways (for real this time!), doing everything possible to obey God's Law to be good with him and with each other again.

That would be life under the Old Covenant. A covenant is an agreement between two parties that each will do what is required of them to complete the deal. The Old Covenant which God gave to his people said, "If you do what I command and obey everything I have told you, then you will be welcome in my presence. You will be my people, and I will be your God who provides for all your needs." Of course, the flipside is, "If you DON'T do what I command, then you won't be welcome in my presence, you won't be my people, and I won't be your God." If you and I think life is difficult now, we haven't seen anything compared to a life like that, separated forever from the gracious presence of the Lord.

But God also knew a covenant like that would never last. Humanity would never uphold our end of the deal. We break the deal and our promises every time we sin, and how many times has it been now? That same sin, over and over again? Not to mention all the other ones too! No, this Old Covenant would never bring peace between God and people. **A New Covenant** was needed, a covenant completely different from the first.

*"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."* Because God knew the Old Covenant would never result in our salvation, he planned from the very beginning to create a New Covenant. What would be different? This covenant would be entirely one-sided. If the Old Covenant were compared to something, it would be a business deal, sealed with a signature and a handshake. You do your part, I'll do mine. But the New Covenant is more like a will: one party does everything, the other simply receives the benefits. So the agreement between God and people now is this: *I will remember your sins and lawless acts no more. Where **these have been forgiven**, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.* In other words, we don't have to do anything to "get on God's good side." He has already placed us there by his love.

What does that mean for us now? ***We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.*** How can something so wonderful be ours, even after everything we've done wrong? This is how! **By the Body and Blood of Jesus.** God does not banish us from his good and gracious presence, even though that's what our sins rightly deserve, because **the body and blood of Jesus** have been sacrificed for us. That's the focus of today just as much as it is tomorrow on Good Friday. **The body and blood of Jesus** are crucial to both days. The Most Holy Place was the part of the temple where God's holy presence remained. No one was ever allowed to enter there, except the high priest, and even then only one day a year and only with blood to atone for sin.

But when Jesus paid for the sins of all people, his body was sacrificed and his blood was shed and sin was truly atoned for forever. The curtain separating the unholiness of humanity from the holiness of God was no longer necessary, because when our sin was forgiven, we stopped being unholy. Now holy people meet freely with the holy God, anytime we want, **because of the body and blood of Jesus.**

Remember the horror, shame, guilt, and disgust we feel as we stare at our broken promises and sins? When sin goes away, all that does too – paid for and forgiven **by the body and blood of Jesus.** In this New Covenant, the very same body and blood which were sacrificed are given to us to eat and drink in a new and holy meal as we hear the clear words spoken: “Your sins are forgiven.” This holy food fills our hearts and souls, strengthening our faith in the most amazing way: **by the body and blood of Jesus.**

All this God does for us in the New Covenant. And he asks nothing of his people in return, except that we come and enjoy it often. What a gift! God freely sacrificed himself to give the forgiveness of sins to all through faith in Jesus Christ, and all he asks in return is that we come into his holy presence often, hearing again what he has done for us and receiving again the forgiveness and peace we need. Dear holy redeemed people, because we have such *confidence to enter the Most Holy Place, enter it!* Boldly and confidently march into the holy presence of your Father in Heaven who loves you. *Draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.* God continues working through his Means of Grace – the Gospel in Word and Sacrament – the good news of forgiveness in Jesus' name, given to us through the faith God creates and strengthens with his Word, Holy Baptism, and Holy Communion. These are all priceless treasures given to us by God in the New Covenant.

So how many times has it been now? This time we're not talking about sin. How many times have you come into the presence of God and heard, “by the authority and command of Jesus Christ, your sins are all forgiven.” How many times have you approached his Holy Table with awe and reverence, ready to taste forgiveness and peace with God and the strengthening of your faith in him. All this is done **by the Body and Blood of Jesus.**

Yet it's amazing how little those truths sometimes affect us. We walk away

from this table acting as if because we've heard these things a thousand times before, that they don't matter quite as much as they used to or that they don't have quite the same impact they once did. But this is a holy table; it always has an effect. Here God pronounces sins forgiven and gone, by faith which clings to the Savior, his Son. Here is found the unstoppable good news of a saving gift from our Father. Here, strengthened through holy food and holy drink, we get up off the ground, no longer covered in guilt or shame, no longer staring at shattered promises, but rather joyfully seeing Jesus' blood and righteousness and a promise perfectly kept for us.

No matter how little or how long it's been, whether this is your first Holy Week or your hundredth Holy Week, keep coming back to this Most Holy Place. It's so beautifully familiar. And *let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. Let us consider how we may spur one another on, not giving up meeting together, but encouraging one another.* It is so good to be near God, who fills us with such hope and peace, and it is eternally life-changing to receive the priceless treasure Jesus gives us in the New Covenant. This is our gracious God, who says, *"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time. I will put my laws in their hearts and will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."* And where **these have been forgiven**, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since **we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body**, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another all the more as you see the Day approaching."* What makes the New Covenant and the promises of Holy Week so powerful? **The Body and Blood of Jesus.** By these, **our sins are forgiven and we confidently enter** the holy presence of our gracious and merciful Savior God. To him be all glory and praise, now and forever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.