

Ultimate Sacrifice Hebrews 10:1-14

Pablo Picasso, the famous artist and sculptor, lived a long life, but in his last years, he apparently preferred to ignore reality. He absolutely refused to permit anyone to mention the subject of death in his presence. He was so wary of the subject that he even refused to make out a will. That reluctance led to chaos and lawsuits among his several heirs when he died. Unwilling to face reality, Picasso left behind misery for others.

Hebrews 9:27 very plainly reads, “Man is destined to die once, and after that the judgment.” That is the realism every person must face; we have no choice in the matter. But, the truth be told, most people are not comfortable thinking about death and dying, whether about their own mortality or that of others. We don’t like thinking about it because it doesn’t feel right and it doesn’t feel right because that’s not how it was meant to be. Death and suffering were not a part of the original design. Our divine God created all that is in perfection, holiness, and life. Adam and Eve, the first of all humanity, was the crown of that creation, like and yet unlike anything else God had made. God created them in his own image. He endowed them with the essence his own being in order that a loving relationship might be experienced by them with God, with each other, and with and over all the created order. Life, not death, was the order of the day – eternal, everlasting, non-ending life.

However, that life was contingent upon the maintenance of a loving relationship with God. When Adam and Eve sinned, the loving relationship they had with God was broken and death resulted. Some have contended that death is God’s punishment for sin. I submit that death is the consequence not a punishment. A deep-sea diver enjoys a wonderful sea-scape because there is an air-hose that connects him or her to the boat on the surface. If that diver should choose to cut the line in order to get more freedom of movement there will be a consequence – that diver

will drown. In a similar way, death is a consequence of sin because sin, which is always both a choice to be like God rather than to have a relationship with God and an act of disobedience against God, by failing to follow the guidelines that God has established to maintain our relationship with God and each other, severs/cuts the source of life.

This is why the Bible takes sin so seriously. Sin separates us from God. Sin is something we do, like cutting the hose to our source of air, but we cannot undo. Sin is something that has contaminated the culture God created for us to live in holy and endearing relationship with God. That is why Paul states that even the rest of creation was subjected to sin and can't wait until the day that it, too, will be set free (Rm.8:20-21).

The truth we find throughout the Bible is that God has constantly sought to restore our relationship with him, even though he doesn't have to. As we often say and hear when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, even though we turned away from God, God never turned away from us. It has always been God's desire and intention that we live in perfect, holy, and loving relationship with Him. So from the very beginning, from the moment that our life-line to Him was severed, God put into place the plan to save us from death. God made the way whereby sinners can find pardon and life can be restored.

Ultimately, of course, God's plan was for a permanent solution. That solution was Jesus. Paul tells us in Galatians, "When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons (children)" (4:5).

What of the time in-between? As God was working the plan for the permanent solution, God also made provision for the in-between time. In the Old Testament sin is dealt with by the offering of sacrifices. The life of an animal, innocent of the sins of the person making sacrifice,

is offered to cover, as it were, the death of that person. These sacrifices, as our text from Hebrews indicates, had to be “repeated endlessly year after year.” But the sacrifices, themselves, were not sufficient to make perfect the one who had come to worship God. Rather, they were an “annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” While given as law to the nation of Israel, God did not necessarily take pleasure in the offering of sacrifices. This provision of God allowed them to be sustained with life, but did not remove the death.

To continue the image of our deep-sea diver who cut the life-line, the Old Testament sacrifice is somewhat like tanks of compressed air being provided on a regular basis. The tanks can sustain life, but not remove the death that is inevitable because the diver is too deep to attain the life sustaining air of the surface.

We cannot achieve life; we are too deep in sin. No amount of sacrificing, no accumulation of good deeds and right conduct will enable us to be restored in our relationship with God. We cannot do it. Why? The Bible tells us, “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Ps. 53:3). Our nature is to sabotage even our own best efforts. Every time we sin we cut ourselves off from God and are again at square one.

Why, then, did God establish the laws to offer up sacrifices? Because the law and the sacrifice point to what was yet to come. In Jesus, God became human and entered the human condition. Early Church Father, Athanasius said, “Christ became human so that humans could become divine.” In death on the cross, Jesus took upon himself our death and then took his life and gave it to us so that we might live. Christ has taken our place, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Our part is to believe and accept that gift of life that is ours for all eternity.

Again using the image of our deep-sea diver, Jesus came with the direct line of life from God, took his mask off and placed it over our face, and told us to breathe deeply and return to God. Then he took our death.

In his perfect sacrifice, Jesus redeemed us, paying the price that sets us free. He made a new covenant, restoring our relationship with God. He won the victory over sin and death. He satisfied the wrath of God toward sin. His love and endurance of suffering set an example for us.

Today, consider your life. Are you at the bottom of the sea with your life-line severed because of sin? Are you trying to sustain life with tanked sacrifices of good deeds and right conduct? They will not save you. Jesus is here right now with a life-line directly to the Father. He will take you as you are. You don't need to do anything. Just accept his life as your own. Breathe deep the life giving breath of God. And, turn toward Him. Your new life can begin now.