**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

 **“And They Shall Know”**

Pastor Aaron Reseburg

Midweek Advent 2, December 11, 2024

*Exodus 29:38-46*

The office of the priest in the Old Testament a very important one. The priests stood between the Israelites and God. At Sinai, God ordains Aaron as the first High Priest. Not only is Aaron the High Priest, but all of the men of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of Aaron and Moses, are to be set aside to be priests. From then on, all priests must be from Levi.

As the Israelites approach the promised land, God divides the land among the tribes. The Levites, however, did not receive a territory, and they could not own land. They were, however, given six cities— referred to as cities of refuge— along with 42 other cities. The cities of refuge were places to which people could flee if they had killed someone. They were not excused from their crime, but they would be safe in the city until a trial of sorts could take place. Otherwise, a family member of the person they had killed could exact revenge in accordance with the law.

Every city given to the Levites would be taken from one of the tribes, and the tribes would also financially support the Levites. Their most important job was to care for, and minister in, first the tabernacle, and then the Temple after it is built. They were to be the ones offering sacrifices on behalf of the people. There were many different kinds of sacrifices and offerings that the priests would make depending on the time of year, the type of sin, and the seriousness of the sin.

The most important sacrifice would be done by the High Priest himself. The High Priest was to be a direct descendant from Aaron. Once a year, the High priest would go into the Holy of Holies and first purify himself, then he would purify the whole congregation of Israel.

Sacrifices and instructions for sacrifice are found all over the Old Testament. But when we look at all of this through the lens of Christ, we see that the sacrifices didn’t really forgive the people’s sins.

The whole Old Testament is painting a picture of who Christ is going to be. It wasn’t the sacrifices that forgave the people their sins; it was their faith in the Word of God. It was their faith in the words of the prophets. The sacrifices in the Old Testament were pointing to a greater Sacrifice to come; the priests in the Old Testament were pointing to a greater Priest to come.

Jesus was coming, and God was preparing His people for it. Soon Christ would come, and He would offer Himself up as a sacrifice not only for the congregation of Israel, but for all mankind. The death of an animal didn’t forgive anyone, and it never will. Our sin and their sin required a much greater payment. The punishment for sin is death. That was what God was trying to teach His people. He was trying to teach them how serious their sin was and how serious the punishment was.

Jesus’ death on the cross paid the punishment not only for all of the sin which would be committed after, but it paid the price for all of this before He died. Jesus became both Priest and Sacrifice. He offered Himself up for you, for me, and for all people. It’s always been faith that has saved. It wasn’t obedience to the law that saved the children of Israel, Jesus makes that very clear in the Gospels. What saved the children of Israel was their faith that one day, a great High Priest would come and take their sins away for good. Each day of atonement gave the people a shadow of the final day of atonement.

The final day of atonement happened when the sinless Great High Priest made Himself a sacrifice. What happened on Good Friday fulfilled and completed all the sacrifices. We don’t need to offer up our own sacrifices to receive forgiveness. Now, we partake of our High Priest’s sacrifice every time we receive the Lord’s Supper.

There, in the bread and in the wine, we receive the body and blood of our Great High Priest. We eat His sacrifice, and we receive the forgiveness that He won for us on the cross. It was, and still is, faith that saves us. It is faith which receives and holds onto the forgiveness Christ has given us.

Our Great High Priest hasn’t forgotten about us. He continues His priestly duties to this day. He continues to teach us through His Word, He continues to pray for us before the Father in heaven, and one day, He is going to do what no priest or High Priest ever could. One day, He is going to return and will raise us from the dead and give us eternal life.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.