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Isaiah 52:13-53:12; John 19:17-30
“Sin-Bearer to Sin-Bearer: The Day of Atonement”
Year B – Good Friday
March 30, 2018

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

From the beginning of this Lenten season on Ash Wednesday, to today, Good Friday, we have made a Lenten journey. From sackcloth and ashes, we have come to the cross. It is a tragic journey, a journey filled with foreboding and sorrow, a journey that leaves a lasting emotional impact on us. Because, like Jesus, we knew all along where this journey was going to end. For us, as Christians today, we knew we would come here, to this Good Friday. We knew we would be standing at the foot of the cross. Because this is not the first time we've been here. Every year, we walk with our Lord to Calvary, step by agonizing step.

To more fully understand, and to give fuller meaning to this road we travel, we have looked back to the history of God's people. And tonight again we look back to the history of the Old Testament. Long before Jesus became flesh, and even long before the words of Isaiah the prophet were spoken, the journey began. The journey began in the days of Moses, and in the wilderness wanderings of the people of Israel.

It was there God promised to dwell with His people, and He gave Moses directions on how to build the tabernacle. There, in the Most Holy Place, the innermost room, God made His presence known, He dwelled at the ark of the covenant. But God's presence among His people came with difficulty. After all, how can unholy, sinful people dwell in the presence of the Holy One of Israel? How can the unworthy be in the presence of the Righteous One? How can man be face-to-face with God?

As a testimony to the terror of this reality, the Israelites had already witnessed the fire that had come from the altar of the tabernacle and consumed the sons of Aaron. Nadab and Abihu offered unholy fire—fire they took from the wrong place, fire from the true presence of God—and they died. How could anyone expect to stand in the presence of a holy God?

The people were terrified. They had holy fear. But God, who chose to dwell with His people, established a way for the Holy to dwell among the unholy. The Lord instituted the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, as it's known. Only on this one day of the whole year the high priest was to go into the Most Holy Place. Only on this one day the high priest was to take the blood of a goat behind the curtain and pour it out on the Mercy Seat as a sacrifice. The people of God were cleansed of their sin on this one day, and they could now dwell with their God without fear. However, that wasn't the only thing that happened on that day. On the Day of Atonement, there was another goat.

The first goat was a sacrifice. The second goat was called the sin-bearer. God instructed Moses in the book of Leviticus (16:20-22) to have the high priest place his hands on the head of the second goat, the live goat, and confess the sins of the people, all their transgressions, over the animal. Then, the high priest was to have the goat sent out, released out into the wilderness, back to Satan, the father of sin, who dwelled in the wilderness. Both animals were important on this day. One was sacrificed to atone for the sins of the people with the blood that was shed. The other was released to carry all the sins of the people away, the “scapegoat.”

In our journey to the cross, we see that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, as He truly is the Atoning sacrifice, and He is also the Sin-bearer, the Scapegoat. The Holy Spirit enabled Isaiah, who wrote 700 years before Christ, to speak of Jesus so accurately. Isaiah describes the Suffering Servant and tells us that surely He has borne our sins and carried our sorrows. He who knew no sin became sin for us as He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world.

We saw this happen in the Baptism of Jesus, as Christ took up all of the sins of the world and then proceeded to carry them out into the wilderness to Satan, where He did battle with the evil one. But that was only the beginning of His sin-bearing journey. Christ continued to bear our sins throughout His earthly ministry, all the way to the cross, where it was finished. Christ carried all of our sins to the mountain at Calvary, and He was lifted up.

And when we look upon that tree, what do we see? We see our sin, for He has carried them to this hill. We see the One who has become our sin for us. And we see the One who has taken the punishment we deserve, not only the physical sentence of death, but the weight of the eternal condemnation our sin had earned.

We see that enormous burden, that brutal sentence, and we know that *we* put Him there. Our sin cost the Son of God, the perfect Lamb, everything. How can we, unholy as we are, even dare to stand in the presence of the Holy One of Israel? How can we, the unworthy, be in the presence of the Righteous One? How can we as mankind be face-to-face with the Son of God, who hangs on the cross in our place, the bearer of all our sin?

But Jesus is the sacrifice for that sin, as well. He has made a way for us to be in the presence of God once again. Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb who, as Isaiah writes, was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted... for you. He is the one whose blood is shed for you, for the forgiveness of your sin.

“Despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. . . . But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed.” Isaiah shows us both the Scapegoat and the Sacrifice. Isaiah shows us Jesus!

And so, the journey that began in the wilderness with the children of Israel, and the journey that began with the Day of Atonement, this journey is fulfilled in Jesus Christ at the cross. Jesus *is* the bearer of our sin, and Jesus *is* the Atonement.

When our Lord and Savior declared, “It is finished!” and then hung His head in death, an amazing thing happened. The sky went dark, and the earth shook. The rocks split, and curtain of the temple—that veil that separated that inner room of the temple—tore in two from top to bottom. The Most Holy Place was for the first time now revealed to the people. That room where the blood from the Atoning sacrifice was brought in every Day of Atonement now stood wide open.

Jesus, the Sin-bearer *and* the Sacrifice, took His very own blood through the curtain into the Most Holy Place and poured it out upon the Mercy Seat for us. Indeed, *it is finished*, and our sins are atoned for. The greatest and last High Priest has gone into the temple—not with the blood of an animal, but with His own precious blood. This blood cleanses and brings atonement not just for the sins of a nation for a single year, but cleanses and brings atonement for all sins, for the whole world, for all time.

It is finished! The journey that began so long ago has come to this place, and has been completed. The Lamb of God—the one who bears our sin and offers Himself as the sacrifice—

fulfills and gives meaning to our journey, as we have traveled with Him from our exile in the wilderness of sin to the cross, where this instrument of torture and death has now become a life-giving tree. The death of Christ, the Son of God, and His blood gives us life. And so this Friday, in its terrible tragedy, is also truly good! In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

(This sermon is adapted from CPH materials for the series, *Return to Exile: A Lenten Journey* 2017.)