

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

As we come closer to the cross, we come closer to understanding what God is truly like.

The cross tells us exactly who God is—
He is one who gives Himself for us.

He's always been that way.
He gave Himself to Israel of old by delivering them from the hand of the Egyptians.
He rescued them, He provided for them,
He gave them a story, a life, an inheritance, and a description of how they were to
be His people; and how He was to be their God.

He made a covenant with them and sealed it with blood—
you remember how it goes in Exodus:
**“And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins,
and half of the blood he threw against the altar.
Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the
people. And they said,
‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’
And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said,
‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in
accordance with all these words.’”** (Exod 24:6-8)

This covenant, this *old* covenant, was made by blood and promise—
promises from God to care for and protect this people;
and promises from Israel to “do all that the Lord has spoken.”
And then the blood covered both of them: the altar and the people.

That covenant, that *old* covenant, was like a marriage.
Both partners agreeing to love and cherish the other, in sickness and health, for richer, for poorer,
‘til death us do part.

But as Jeremiah tells us today in our OT reading, something went horribly wrong!

This covenant, this *old* covenant, was broken;
not by God—He kept His part—but by us, by our ancestors of old.

They were unfaithful,
they cheated on their groom,
they were adulterous in their lust after other gods, other providers, other givers and other lovers.
And with them, we were too.

We didn't keep our end of the covenant, we didn't do *all that the Lord commanded.*
In fact, we didn't even keep the first commandment of 10!

We broke the covenant.

Those 10 words, which were intended to describe for us what our life would be like,
ended up killing us as we realized how much our lives weren't like those 10 words.

They were meant to be for us a mirror,
but what we saw wasn't pretty.

We saw in that mirror a murderer and a liar, a betrayer and an adulterer.
We saw God's own enemy.

We broke His law.
We broke His covenant—
a covenant that was meant to guarantee our safety and joy and peace.

And it wasn't something we could fix.

But God could.

So Jeremiah tells us today God's plan for fixing the covenant.

But it's not really a fixed *old* covenant—
it's a *new* covenant.

And as Hebrews says,
"In speaking of a new covenant, He makes the first one obsolete" (8:13).

That first covenant, that first marriage, was a covenant of blood and promise—
but the blood was the blood of goats and oxen, sheep and cattle.

The *new* covenant would also be of blood and promise—
but no longer would sacrificial animals give their blood for us,
it would be God Himself.

"Therefore," the book of Hebrews says, **"He is the mediator of a *new* covenant...
And not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood.
For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people,
he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop,
and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying,
"This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you."
Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood,
and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."** (Hebrews 9:15-22)

"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

And that's where Christ comes in.

He gives Himself for us, shedding His blood for us, so that we could be again God's own people.

And this is the point:

The self-giving of Christ is the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah.

That God is our God and we are His people is brought about *only* through the shedding of Christ's blood for us.

In that self-sacrifice of God, He makes Himself the servant of all,
shedding His blood to cover the sins of *all*.

While we continually break that *old* covenant,

constantly setting ourselves against our neighbors, over, before, and above them—

Christ perfectly serves for us.

He makes Himself less, weaker, lower, and below us.

He empties Himself of His own glory and power and might—all for us.

He suffers the pains of the cross,

the agony and humiliation, all *for us*.

He Himself is the new covenant.

And He gives Himself to us!

This is what we disciples always need to learn, again and again and again.

James and John asked Jesus to sit at His right and His left in glory.

They wanted the honor and prestige of being the closest and best disciples—
and don't we all?

But Jesus turns their question of glory into a proclamation of the cross:

“Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mk 10:38)

They say, “yes”—but don't really know what Jesus is on about here.

What baptism is He speaking of? What cup?

Our Lord describes His upcoming Cross and Passion in the way of the Holy Sacraments:

it's the Baptism with which He is baptized,
and the Chalice (or the cup) which He drinks.

Not only that, but the faith and life of His disciples, *our* faith and life,

is being baptized with His Baptism, and of drinking His Cup.

By sharing these Sacraments of His Cross we live with Him in the glory of His Kingdom.

However, the baptism and cup that Jesus undergoes is death for Him;

it's cross and judgment and the wrath of God.

But for us, the Baptism and the Cup that *we* receive, is life;
it's forgiveness and salvation and joy!

Everything crescendos, builds up, and flows toward that cross, that Baptism, that Cup—
both for Him and for us.

Death for Him, in the cup which He drinks and the baptism which He undergoes,
but life for us, in Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

In these, Christ continues to serve us—
that's why we call what goes on here, *Divine Service*: God serving us with His gifts.

He does it all by actually sacrificing Himself for you,
and by continuing to serve you with His Gospel:
giving Himself to you, washing you with water and His Word in Holy Baptism,
cleansing you daily with His Holy Absolution,
where He gets down upon His hands and knees to wash your dirty feet.

And as He has received the Cup of His Passion from the hand of His Father,
and on the cross drained it to the dregs for you and your salvation,
so does He pour out the Cup, which is the New Covenant in His Blood,
for the forgiveness of all your sins.

By that Cup and that Baptism, you will with James and John receive your proper places,
seated with Him, at His Table, in the glory of His righteousness and holiness,
now and forever.

And though we're often like James and John, wanting more and better, higher and greater—
but not knowing what we ask—
Christ keeps calling us back down to where He is:
as servant and slave of all.

For where He is, giving His gifts,
His Baptism, His Cup,
that is where we want to be.

***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served,
but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*** (Mk 10:45)

So if you want to know God more or better,
then you must keep coming closer and closer to His cross.

For everything flows from the cross—
and that is where we truly learn who God is and what He's like *for us*.

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