**Advent – Week 4
December 22, 2024**

**Agents of Refreshing Wholeness**

**Hebrews 10:5-10**

*Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said:*

*“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me;with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased.Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.’”*

*First, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

**<Prayer>**

It's an ugly scene when a spoiled kid doesn't get what they want for Christmas. It's not just the tears and wailing, the kicking and screaming. It is the exposure of a selfish heart. It is just plain ugly. Perhaps you have seen kids fall apart by not getting what they wanted at a children's gift exchange. Maybe you have one of those kids.

Have you ever stopped to consider that your life is a gift to Christ? We know Christ gave His life for us, but the way in which we live our lives is a gift to Christ. What does He want? How does He want us to live?

We are thinking about being the agents of Christ in the world, centering our thoughts around this one phrase found in John 20:21, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”* This morning, we want to particularly focus our thoughts on being agents of refreshing wholeness.

The scripture this morning tells us sacrifices and offerings are not what God desires. These are the words of Christ: “*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire.... with burnt offerings and sin offerings  you were not pleased.”*

It is true - God instituted the sacrificial system. But it is not the sacrifices that God desires. You could come to God with a beautiful sacrifice, and your heart could be right. But it is not the sacrifice the Lord wants; it is the heart.

*With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:6-8).*

It is in many ways like giving a Christmas gift. You can give someone a gift from your heart, or you can give a gift out of obligation. The gift out of obligation really has no meaning. It is just some more stuff. But how many mothers have received with joy the handful of dandelions from a child? It isn't the gift; it is the heart.

When Christ came, he didn't come to offer up burnt offerings and sin offerings. He didn't come to do what the priests were already doing. We don't find the picture of Jesus as the priest taking an animal, slaughtering it, and placing it on the altar. That might have been impressive. God comes down from heaven and shows how the sacrifice with a pure heart is to be made. It would almost be like saying, “Move over priests, let me show you how this should be done.”

But God did not desire sacrifice and offering. He gave Jesus a body. And it is through the body of Jesus that the will of God was done. There is this interesting phrase in this passage of scripture. *“I have come to do your will, O God.*” It is in verse 7 and again in verse 9. It talks about Jesus setting aside the first covenant to establish the second. It is a fairly important concept in the Kingdom ... doing the will of God.

You remember when it came down to doing the will of the Father, it was in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus prayed, “Not my will, but thine be done.” It was this issue of Him having a body that He had to bring under subjection and submit to the will of God.

If you look at your footnotes, you realize this is a quote from Psalm 40:6-8. Here it is in the NIV.

*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, “Here I am, I have come — it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; Your law is within my heart.’*

Instead of “a body you prepared for me,” it says, “My ears you have pierced.” This is an interesting difference because the Hebrew is translated with the ear piercing, but the Septuagint (which was the Hebrew translated in the Greek) has it as “a body you have prepared for me.” And the writer of Hebrews follows the Septuagint. It is interesting because of the context for having your ears pierced. It comes from Exodus 21 in the passage about setting slaves free:

*If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.*

*But if the servant declares, 'I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.*

The picture is a submission of the will of the servant to the will of the master. And this is the picture of Jesus, submitting His will to the will of the Father. This is the Father's will, not sacrifice and offering, but a heart that is forever His!

Then we have this wonderful phrase: *And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* What has happened by the will of God? We have been made holy! How? Through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. How effective was that sacrifice? Once for all.

It is God's will that you be holy. He sent Jesus and gave Him a body for you to be holy. Christ’s sacrifice is so effective you do not need to live in the endless cycle of sin. If we had read further in Hebrews 10, we would have read:

*Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties;* *again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. Since that* *time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

And if we had read even further, we would have read:

*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

Here's where the rubber meets the road. God's design is for us to live transformed lives through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. In fact, He says, we have been made holy! It doesn't say we are considered holy. It is an act that has happened in the past with continuing results.

Jesus didn't come to show us the right way to do what we were already doing. He came to do what we couldn't do, to provide for us to become who we couldn't be without Him. This is radical stuff. Stuff most who call themselves Christians live without. They live without it, not because it isn't God's will or design, but because they have never submitted their will to God in all things and accepted this as the gift of Jesus.

What they know is their experience. And their experience tells them they will fail because we cannot make ourselves holy. Only Christ can make us holy. Too many want Jesus as hell insurance. Others just decide there is no hell.

But what God wants is to be the love of your life! He wants you to be holy. We sing about it:

In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me:
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
While God is marching on.

We often focus on making men free, but this is a time to reflect upon Jesus making us holy. Jesus has transforming power. The sacrifice of His body has done that once for all.

Then why am I not experiencing it?

Does Jesus have your complete affection? Is He the object of your highest affection? I see this as the downfall of many. It is Christ alongside other lovers. You can walk through the whole Bible, and you will see this is the story.

It is the story in the Garden of Adam and Eve.

It is the story of Cain and Abel.

It is the story of Abraham and Sarah.

It is the story of Issac and Rebekah.

It is the story of Jacob and Esau.

It is the story of Joseph and his brothers.

It is the story of the Israelites in Egypt, in the wilderness, and Canaan.

It is the story of King Saul and his disobedience.

It is the story of David and Bathsheba.

It is the story of Soloman with the love of many women who caused him to set up idol worship.

It is the story of every succeeding king.

It is the story of Hosea and Gomer.

It is the story of Peter, James and John.

It is the story of the denial of all the disciples.

It is the story of Ananias and Sapphira.

It is the story of the churches in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse.

It is the story of the seven Churches of Asia Minor.

It is the story of the Bible. And if you have read the Bible, this will be evident.

There is a God. His name is Jesus. And we are called to follow Him. And we are to love Him with all we have. Anything short of complete love for Him will not do.

But if you choose to go your own way, it will not go well. If you say, “I want to follow Jesus, but I want to do things my way,” it is an indicator you are only interested in the sacrifice and not the person of Jesus.

If you keep on deliberately sinning after you know the truth, you are saying to Jesus, “I wish you had never been born.”

Here's a wonderful thing about Jesus. He still wants you! And He has made the way to transform your life through the sacrifice of His body.

Jesus came to provide a way for us to be whole, refreshingly whole, not just covered over with a fresh coat of paint, or with our sins swept under the rug. He has made us holy. Our world needs to see the evidence of lives lived in this reality. Our agency as ambassadors of Christ, sent by the Father, is found not merely in our words but in a truly transformed life, a life not marked by rigid legalism, but by refreshing wholeness, life reflecting the incredible beauty of Jesus alive in us.