Follow Jesus Sermon Series

"Follow the Blood" -- Hebrews 9:22

Ash Wednesday Sermon

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

In Genesis 3:19-21 the Christian faith is summarized. The return to dust following the original sin leads to the ashes of sorrow and to contrition; for it is most certain that God did say when He declared the consequences of transgressing the Law, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (v. 19). Then, based upon the Gospel promise of the Savior born of the woman, the first Adam "called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living" (v. 20), that is, she is the mother from whom both the Living God would be given, which is the Christ, and the living Body of Christ would issue forth, which is the Church. To provide the assurance of His forgiveness of the original sin and of all their subsequent sins to them and to their children, and to demonstrate their restored communion with Him, "the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them" (v. 21).

But ponder for a moment. Between verses 20 and 21 something happened that was of Divine necessity, though not because God had need for it to take place. Rather, it was done by the LORD God for us men and for our salvation. What happened was this ... an innocent victim shed its blood and died in order to provide a sufficient and necessary covering for all of humanity. This first sacrifice points us to Christ and the truth of this evening's sermon text, Hebrews 9:22. Therefore, on this Ash Wednesday, please listen to that one verse as we ...

... "Follow the Blood."

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

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

In Genesis 9:4 God, through the Prophet Moses, reveals to us in the living Word that life is in the blood. No blood, no life. Rather, there is death. The same is true of bad blood, in which case, death is only a matter of time. Because of sin there is bad blood between God and man. Because of sin there is bad blood between man and man, even as brother Cain rose up and murdered the shepherd of the sheep. The LORD said to Cain, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand" (Genesis 4:10-11).

Two trails of blood coursing through history and across the cursed ground:

"Abel's blood for vengeance pleaded to the skies,
But the Blood of Jesus, for our pardon cries."
("The Lutheran Hymnal," 158, stanza #4)

... one trail shouting bloody murder to Jehovah petitioning for a payback drop for drop ... the other trail, as wine from the Victim's veins poured out as an absolution seeking to bestow Life for the soul; that is, "of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," (Revelation 13:8) and Who is "the Lamb of God Which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) for "Without the shedding of Blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Two trails of blood streaming through real time in this fallen land of thorns and thistles:

... one is the deadly path of the Law that announces Divine judgment on Cain, the son of Adam, as well as always accusing the bloodline of Adam, present company included ... the other is the narrow way of the Gospel that always comforts and soothes the sons of God, again, present company included.

Follow the Blood. But which blood ought one to follow? That seems like an easy answer, a real no-brainer. You perceive that following the blood of this world is simply life in this world. If you break the Law you can expect, depending on the severity, to pay the price with a tooth or an eye or even with your life. For "whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image" (Genesis 9:6). Even under the Law, if man doesn't exact the penalty price and seemingly gets away with the crime without having to do the time, God is neither spoofed nor hood-winked. God will catch up with you in time, and certainly in eternity. Cain was confronted with that reality when God dealt with him. Cain deserved everything he got.

But the trail of this world's blood is often not fair. That is, sometimes a person pays a price which was not deserved. Think about it. Abel did not deserve to be murdered by his brother. Abel paid a price greater than what he deserved and therein one can become so easily sidetracked, thinking that now God owes Abel and will reward him for the unjust price he paid. After all, the young shepherd was a faithful member of the church and he trusted in the LORD God. His life was taken away from him. It sure seems like God owes him.

Such thoughts appeal to the old Adam. The reasoning is natural and runs something like this. If we could do enough good works, while at the same time suffer unjustly, then we are owed. Others can not repay us, so God will reward us. "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Proverbs 16:25). This is one of those ways. In the shedding of man's blood there is only a cry for vengeance and there is no forgiveness forthcoming.

Follow the Blood. The trail begins in the Garden of Eden with the innocent victim shedding blood and providing the substitute cover that Jehovah graciously gives to Adam and Eve. This Good News declares their absolution and bespeaks their restoration to the congregation of God. The pathway from Paradise and on to Paradise traverses time. On Mount Moriah the Divine substitute is given that stays the sacrifice of Isaac.

Indeed, "Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place The LORD will provide; as it is said to

this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided" (Genesis 22:13-14). This offering points to Christ, to the Incarnate Son of God Whom God the Father would send to be that Substitute. "For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Centuries later, the lamb's blood of the first Passover would stay the Angel of Death. Daubed onto the house's header and the two doorposts, the faithful family within was covered. Those abodes without the blood of the lamb of God suffered the consequences of death, "For without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins."

Throughout the Old Testament journey from the days of the Exodus from Egypt to the days when a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, the Church lived in and looked forward to the Day of Atonement. Whether in the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle or the Temple the LORD was graciously present with His people. In order for the faithful to live in, with and under Him, they were given the furnishings and rites of the sacrifice.

Therefore we are able to see that "even the first covenant was not ratified 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 which God commanded you.' And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Hebrews 9:18-22).

These sacrifices were not for God as He had no need of them, but rather they were for us men and for our salvation. Indeed, via the prophet, the LORD made it known that "the life of the flesh is in the blood; and" He said, "I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of the life" (Leviticus 17:11).

At the same time, we ought to keep in mind that it is not the blood of animals that grants remission of sins, eternal life and salvation. "But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3-4). Only the Blood of God does such great things. The Church hymns this truth during Lent when she sings:

"Not all the blood of beasts, On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace, Or wash away the stain."
"But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away;
A Sacrifice of nobler Name, And richer Blood than they."
("The Lutheran Hymnal," 156, stanzas #1 & 2)

This makes the Incarnation a great and mighty wonder for here is that richer Blood, Who is Emmanuel, which means "God with us." The Savior would be true man in order to have blood and to bleed. The Savior would be true God in order to provide a sufficient Sacrifice for all people. Dearly beloved, behold the Christ. The first drop of Divine Blood shed for the life of the world took place when the Son of God and the Son of Man was eight days old and was named Jesus, which means "Savior."

Travel with our Redeemer for another thirty years as He journeys to the day when the Sacrifice is made. On the last celebration of the Lord's Passover, when He had supped, Jesus "took a cup, and

when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is My Blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27-28). On that first celebration of the Lord's Supper the Church commenced what she has done to this Ash Wednesday night and what she will continue to do until the Last Day; namely to eat the Body of Christ and to drink the Blood of Jesus.

As you continue your Lenten journey, follow the Blood that is shed for the world. It streams from His scourged back and drips from His thorn-encircled brow. Behold, others have traveled in His train. Simon of Cyrene follows Christ, bearing His cross and trailing after the bleeding Savior (Luke 23:26). The faithful few stand at the foot of the cross as the 30-year-old eternal God sheds His Blood for you, that you may be His own, that you may be baptized into His Death, that you may be forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost, that you may be at the on-going Feast.

"Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross be borne for me, for you,
Hail, hail the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary."
("Lutheran Worship," 61, stanza #2)

"When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but His own Blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the Blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the Living God" (Hebrews 9:11-14). In other words, Follow the Blood. Amen.

"Now may the God of peace Who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, by the Blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will, working in you that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Hebrews 13:20-21).