Follow Jesus Sermon Series

"Follow the Curtain" -- Hebrews 10:19-22

Good Friday 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,

A certain darkness descended upon the land where it was never intended and the curtain came down to separate the most holy place from the man who hid himself among the trees of the Garden of Eden. The man's sinful heart sought nothing more than avoiding the holy LORD God Who had "formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the Breath of Life" (Genesis 2:7). Thus Adam was dead and dying. He could not and he would not part the curtain to go into the Presence of God. Thus God must come to him. If God would not, then Adam and his sinful sons and daughters, present company included, would be lost forever. God only could do this and this God did that this might not be so.

A certain darkness covered the land where it was never expected and the curtain came down to separate the Father from the Son Who had given of Himself among the leafless trees of Golgotha. The Christ's perfect heart brought Him to this Sacrifice in order to be and to open the Way of Life into the Holy of Holies; that is, into the Presence of the LORD God Almighty. Thus Jesus was dead and dying. He Who came down from heaven, would not come down from the cross until the complete venting of God's wrath against all your sins and your sinfulness had taken place and the wages of the same had been paid in full. This God did so that the curtain that separates might no longer be so.

Hebrews 10:19-22 ... Follow the Curtain ...

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the Sanctuary by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living Way which He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His Flesh, and since we have a great Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

God would be present with His people, but it would be a veiled Presence. To accomplish this "Emmanuel" - this "God-with-us" - where the perfectly holy LORD is with the completely wretched man, certain specifications regarding a curtain were necessary. God, according to His mercy and benevolence, relates the requirements for one separation from another to Moses:

"And you shall hang the veil from the clasps, and bring the Ark of the Testimony in thither within the veil; and the veil shall separate for you the Holy Place from the Most Holy. You shall put the

Mercy Seat upon the Ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place" (Exodus 26:33-34).

Man needs to know and learn from the Word that this is no symbol or representation when the LORD God says words to the effect "This is My Presence." God is really and truly present in, with and under the veiled elements beyond the curtain. That one might not approach unworthy and unprepared, ...

"the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at all times into the Holy Place within the veil, before the Mercy Seat which is upon the Ark, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud upon the Mercy Seat. But thus shall Aaron come into the Holy Place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and shall have the linen breeches on his body, be girded with the linen girdle, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy garments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. And he shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house" (Leviticus 16:2-6).

Thus, dearly beloved children of God, follow the curtain and listen. For "a tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the Bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies, having the golden altar of incense and the Ark of the Covenant covered on all sides with gold, which contained a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the Tables of the Covenant; above it were the cherubim of Glory overshadowing the Mercy Seat. Of these things we cannot now speak in detail. These preparations having thus been made, the priests go continually into the outer tent, performing their ritual duties; but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood which he offers for himself and for the errors of the people" (Heb. 9:2-7).

This is what took place for many centuries, each priest doing what was appointed and awaiting the day when the Messiah [which translated is "the Christ"] would come. Then one day, a priest from the division of Abijah goes into the Temple to burn incense. A pulling back of the curtain takes place; a revelation from the Presence of God occurs, the messenger of glad tidings steps forth. The angel Gabriel stands before Zechariah to bring the old priest the message that he would be a father, and that his son would be named John, and that John would be the voice preparing the way for the Word made flesh and dwelling among us.

Half a year after John's birth our Savior was born. A generation and a half later our Jesus is offering the Sacrifice that satisfies both God and man. Follow the Curtain, for herein it is parted and therein is Christ the Victim Who is, and Christ the Priest Who offers, the Perfect Sacrifice. Indeed, "when Christ appeared as 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).

This took place when Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God was crucified and cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30). "And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up His Spirit. And behold, the

curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split" (Matthew 27:50-51).

Follow the Curtain as it is torn in two from top to bottom. "From top to bottom" indicates many truths, including ...

First, that our Savior and our Salvation is from above, that is, from God. Eternal Life comes down to us for we could not ascend to the place where God is.

Second, that we are justified by the grace of God through faith that is bestowed from heaven above to earth below, and this is not because of works.

Third, that no other Sacrifice is now needed. All transgressions are covered. Complete and total forgiveness and pardon has been accomplished for us men and for our salvation by Christ.

Fourth, that the Levitical priesthood and the earthly temple and the sacrificial system of the Old Testament are over and done with, being replaced by the Presence of the LORD among His people in Word and Sacrament.

Fifthly, the Way into the Presence of God is no longer restricted. All the faithful are now priests of God and may enter His Presence with thanksgiving and singing, ...

"To Thy temple I repair; Lord, I love to worship there
When with-in the veil I meet, Christ before the mercy seat."
(The Lutheran Hymnal, #2, stanza 1)

Sixthly, the tearing of the curtain of the temple from top to bottom extends into the dead places of the earth and proclaims the Resurrection of the faithful for, at that instant when the curtain was torn, "the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised" (Matthew 27:51-52).

"The great veil was torn asunder,
Earth did quake mid roars of thunder,
Boulders, boulders, into bits were breaking;
Sainted, sainted dead from death were waking."
(The Lutheran Hymnal, #169, stanza 4)

"Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the Sanctuary by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living Way which He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His Flesh, and since we have a great Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." Amen.