

**Proper 26 Year B**  
**Ruth 1:1-18; Psalm 146; Hebrews 9:11-14; Mark 12:28-34**  
**Rev. Mark A. Lafler**

**10/31/2021**

Today is All Hallows Eve...

Or better known as Halloween.

Many children and youth will gather this evening seeking to receive candy from their friends and neighbors...

The evening can be a bit gory and scary...

I pray it is a safe evening for all of you.

Of course, being that today is the day it is...

It is a bit ironic to have the Big Red Bus in our parking lot today...

As some of us will give blood today to help people in our community.

Blood of course is essential to life.

We can't live without it, and we need it flowing throughout our body.

Blood is often equated with life itself.

Blood is also a key word in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Old Testament the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation required a blood sacrifice.

The High Priest would perform this duty on the Day of Atonement.

Of course, in the New Testament the blood of Jesus is important in our faith and doctrine.

In our second reading today from the book of Hebrews the word blood appears four times.

Twice referring to the blood of goats and bulls.

Twice referring to the blood of Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews is comparing the Old Testament blood sacrifices to the *once and for all* sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

That sacrifice was of course on the cross...

Where Jesus shed his own blood in order to provide eternal redemption.

And it is in the belief of this sacrifice...

This atonement for our sins...

That we have been given the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

St. Paul says as much in Romans chapter three.

He writes:

*God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. (Romans 3.25)*

So the sacrifice of Christ Jesus...

Which we call the atonement...

Is made possible through the shedding of the blood of Christ.

And this atonement is received by faith.

It is not something we earn or deserve.

It is a belief, a conviction, an act of faith.

It is the blood of Christ that washes us anew.

It is in the very act of Jesus on the cross that gives us new life.

It is not through living a good life.

It is not by giving to the local church.

It is not by helping the poor.

All of those things are good things... but they cannot save your soul.

It is only through Jesus Christ that we can be reconciled to the Father.

It is only through the blood of Jesus.

By faith in the saving act of God Incarnate... Jesus Christ on the cross.

St. Peter writes in his first letter to the church:

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. (1 Peter 1.18-19).*

It is by the grace of God through faith in the blood sacrifice of Jesus that we are saved and from that justification...

that salvation...

we serve God with our good works in this world...

these good works that are stirred up within us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is the blood of Christ that provides a way for forgiveness of sins.

It is the blood of Christ that makes possible eternal life.

It is the blood of Christ that changes the way we live.

It is the blood of Christ that makes us whole again.

It is the blood of Christ that brings healing to our hearts, souls, and minds.

When I was growing up in the 1980's we would often sing a hymn from the Baptist tradition...

It was written by Robert Lowry in 1876.

Some of you may know it...

This is the hymn from the *United Methodist Hymnal 1989*.

Here are the words:

*What can wash away my sin?*

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*What can make me whole again?*

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*O precious is the flow*

*that makes me white as snow;*

*no other fount I know;*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*For my pardon this I see:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*For my cleansing this my plea:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*Nothing can for sin atone:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*Naught of good that I have done:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*This is all my hope and peace:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

*This is all my righteousness:*

*nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

The opening line of the hymn – *What can wash away my sin* – comes from the book of Revelation...

Where the persecuted... present in the throne room of God...

the ones who have been martyred...

they are serving God and worshipping God...

John, the writer of the book of Revelation, asks who these people in white robes are...

And the reply is this:

*These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

(Revelation 7.14)

It is by the blood that we are made new.

And this is where our faith and our faithfulness collide together.

Where are belief and practice meet.

Because although we are saved by faith...

It is in our practice of the sacrament that we also receive the blood of Christ our Lord...

in a physical way.

For it is in Holy Communion...

In our Eucharistic feast that we receive the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

And perhaps one of the deepest prayers in our worship...

In our liturgy expresses this...

Coming from our rite one liturgy...

Just before we receive the sacrament, we pray together the *Prayer of Humble Access* (BCP, 337).

We pray these words:

*We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies.*

*We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under thy Table.*

*But thou are the same Lord whose property is always to have mercy.*

*Grant us therefore, gracious Lord, so to eat the flesh of thy dear Son Jesus Christ, and to drink his blood, that we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen.*

It is in the sacrament of communion when we partake of the cup...

Christ present in the wine...

That we experience the blood of Christ flowing through us.

For it is Jesus who at the Last Supper *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 covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.* (Matthew 26.27-28)

It is in the sacrament of our Lord where we partake of his body and blood.

His presence in the bread and wine.

It's where we experience Christ Jesus not just in our mind but on our lips.

And yet here we are... countless months now into a pandemic that has taken from us the cup...

We receive communion now and have been only in one kind...

The bread.

We have not received the blood of Christ since March of 2020 here at St. Edward's.

For the safety of all and following the guidelines that our Bishop has set forth we have not received.

And I have to tell you... it's hard.

In my own prayers, I have prayed over and over... *How long O Lord?*

Jesus said: *This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.* (1 Corinthians 11.25)

I believe the inference here is to receive the body and blood of Christ as often as possible.

Yet we have not touched the blood of our Lord with our lips for a long, long time.

Frustrating, painful, and discouraging are just some of the words we may use to describe our emotions on this.

And I think there are three things we need to keep in mind during this season of dryness...

*First*, by not being able to receive the cup we find ourselves in a much better position to understand the poverty that so many have...

soldiers deployed to war, the sick in the hospital, those with other infirmities who cannot receive... we experience just a touch of their longing and pain... this is not necessarily a bad thing.

*Second*, the blood of Christ is powerful... and the last time you received from the cup is sufficient enough to see you through the rest of your days. That last drop you tasted is powerful enough.

And *finally*, this time of not receiving has hopefully welled up in you a longing to receive... a desire to receive from the cup again.

And let me tell you...

It's coming.

I don't know when.

But one day...

Here at St. Edward's Episcopal Church in beautiful Mount Dora,  
Florida...

We will all receive of the cup again.

And I look forward to that day.

For it is who we are...

People of the body and blood of Christ.

People re-born because of the blood of Christ.

People who are knit together as a family because we are washed in the blood of Christ our Lord.

So...

Today...

All Hallows Eve...

The day before we celebrate all the saints that have gone before us...

What connects us with them...

Is the blood of Christ.

May we as people of the body and blood of our Lord...

Have a greater understanding of who we are in Christ Jesus.

Because of his sacrifice on the cross.

May we be reminded on this day...

*What can make me whole again?*

*Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

Amen.