

Midweek Lenten Service – 2021
Blessings in the Blood of Christ
The Blood of Christ Gives Access
Hebrews 10:19-25
Hebrews 10:26-39

Y'all know what a "pioneer" is, don't you? The dictionary defines it this way: "a person who is among the first to explore or settle a new country or area." That definition is for the noun form of the word. There is a verb form as well, spelled the same of course, but it's an action word: "to develop or to be the first to use or apply a new method, new area of knowledge, or new activity."

Having grown up in the United States and being a product of our sterling American school system of the '60s and '70s, I equate the word "pioneer" with those brave and hearty individuals who settled the untamed frontiers in North America. The pioneers left family and friends, not knowing if they would ever see them again. Dangers were many. Native Americans were a threat, as was disease, hostile weather, and accidents of all sorts. It was the unknown they were headed into. All along the various trails they followed were grave markers, places where prior pioneers rested in peace. Covered wagons, strung together to form a train, would make their way from the settled east across prairies, woodlands, rocky terrain and raging rivers, to make a new life in the unsettled west.

Those pioneers paved the way. Those courageous men and women blazed a trail for others to follow. You are a direct beneficiary of their action, their spirit, their success. To be sure, a great many have come after them who also helped to build a better society, a better network of life where people can navigate this world in greater safety, in the pursuit of new discoveries that advance our human condition. Ah, but the pioneers, they were uniquely heroic.

Whether one knows it or not, we are all on our way. Life is a pilgrimage. There is only one Pioneer. One either follows Him and discovers the place He opened or one dwells in darkness, an endless despair, a hell of self and emptiness and suffering. Heaven; there is a key to the Pearly Gates. Heaven; there is only One who has blazed the trail, who pioneered the way, who opens to you the living way into the very sanctuary of God. Heaven; access depends on the Pioneer. Enter through Him or enter not at all.

In ancient Israel, the High Priest would go into the Most Holy Place once a year – on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. He would carry blood. After being consecrated himself, after a ritual washing for his purification, the High Priest would enter the Most Holy Place through the curtain, a remarkable fabric division that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. He carried the blood into the inner sanctuary to atone, to render payment, for the sins of the people. The blood was taken to the mercy seat (the cover on the Ark of the Covenant), where God's local presence resided. God Himself prescribed this rite, this religious act, to teach the Israelites (and us) what the Pioneer would do. Once the rite was completed by the High Priest, relief settled on the people. Sin was atoned for, taken away, absolved and forgiven. Relief settled on people who with real names and real addresses and real consciences.

Has guilt ever visited the house of your heart? Have you ever stewed in the soup of your own shame? Have you ever grimaced and turned away from your own soul, knowing what resides there, knowing what you have done, knowing how impotent you were to undo what you had done? The feeling of guilt... who is the author of that feeling? Does it serve humanity well? How does a Christian understand guilt? How are we to respond to this strong and unpleasant force?

You know that your sins disqualify you. On your own, with your personal shame and your personal guilt, you are disqualified. The disqualified don't have access. You don't have the right attire, you don't have the right purity, your thoughts and your behavior disqualify you; you can't gain access. You don't have the right key, the right password, the right handshake. The record of your sins is long and full of infamy. Not just you; that bloke next to you; that little filly two pews up from you. All of us are disqualified. There is not a single personality trait in any of you that can change that. So, the Pioneer steps in. The Pioneer happens to be a High Priest, the *Great* High Priest. There is no need for water or blood to consecrate Him for He is pure through and through, He is the Holiest of the Holy, the incarnate Son of God and He came to blaze a trail. The Pioneer steps in for all of us who have disqualified ourselves.

For Him, difficulties were many. Human hazards and demonic traps, His life was a labyrinth of danger. Like any proper priest, He had His eyes set on an altar. His altar would be a cross. Blood would be summoned; by wounds, by enormous suffering, by love and grace and fidelity – a flow of blood unlike any other would be summoned by this Priest, this Victim, this Pioneer. It would come from His own body. Crucified, the Lord Christ and He alone atones for our sin. His blood is your key, your qualification and the removal of your guilt. This Priest gives you access. This Pioneer opens the sanctuary, the final sanctuary. You are on your way, not just you but that bloke next to you and that little filly two pews up from you. Jesus is your Great High Priest. Jesus is both Pioneer and Priest. He inaugurated a new and living way into heaven. It is living because He is living. It is living because it is the way to eternal life with the living God. He pioneered the way through His flesh. The way is His crucified and risen body. He carried His blood into heaven. He sets His wounds before His Father and speaks your name. Father, forgive. His blood is our access.

When the Lord Christ died, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two. Access was won. Atonement was complete. And Christ was prepared to enter the Most Holy Place of heaven. Forty days after His resurrection He did precisely that... for you. The Pioneer prepares the frontier of God's kingdom. Didn't He say: "I go to prepare a place for you"? His flesh is the curtain, the way of entry in God's presence. You are on your way. He has called you to Himself and leads you on the way. He provides access. Not just later. Not just when you die. Not just as you leave this world and make your way definitively. Now; you have access now. "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" (Hebrews 10:22). You can draw near to God in confidence because Christ bore your guilt and your shame and He spent His blood to make you holy, to wash you, to sprinkle your heart clean. You are a baptized Christian and you gather in this place as the body of Christ, His church. Now; life and fellowship with Him now. Draw near with a true heart... now. Access to God now. Participate in heavenly realities now.

The way from earth to heaven is in front of your eyes. This church is cruciform, which is to say that it is in the shape of a cross. But more, look at the center aisle. Look at where it leads. All of us, individually, are on our way. To where? To heaven, to the living realm of the living God. The Lord Christ pioneered the way. His blood gives us access. His flesh is the curtain through which we enter. But look at our center aisle. Look where it leads. It goes through the nave, into the chancel and up to the sanctuary where His altar stands as a monument of grace/heaven. The way is open. The way that Christ prepared for you by His death and resurrection, where you have access to His blood, where your guilt is removed and you commune with the living God. Pardoned sinners are welcomed into God's holy presence. Let us draw near. Our confidence is in His blood. You and I, we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.