

13 August 2006
Pentecost 10

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Not a Bread King, a *Blood King*”

Text: Exodus 24:3-11; John 6:1-15; Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Before the Old Testament reading for today, God had just brought His people out of Egypt with His mighty arm. He inflicted the Egyptians with ten terrible plagues. He provided the riches of the Egyptians to His people as pay for all their years of unpaid labor. He Himself led them out in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He divided the Red Sea for them, and closed it back over Pharaoh and his army. He provides for them water from a rock to slake their thirst, and every morning appears manna, as He gives them their daily bread all over the ground. And always more than they could eat. The armies of the countries that this rag tag, untrained group of slaves run into are defeated by the hand of the Lord. And in all of it, *they have done nothing*. It is the Lord who has chosen them, rescued them, provided for them, and fought for them. God 100%, the people 0%.

So now, the Moses Travel Agency reaches Mt. Sinai. God gives them His Word there, and when Moses tells the people all the words of the Lord and His *judgments* (which is really a better translation here than *rules*), the people respond altogether, with one voice, as the church gathered in that place, *three times* (twice in the reading we heard today, and once back in chapter 19) – and they say, “***All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.***”

And you know, they actually thought they could do it! And so do we. Oh, yes, God has done everything up until this point, 100% – but *now* its time to even the score a little bit. Pay God back. Earn our keep, and our adoption, and our sonship. Prove our love, our worth, that God didn’t make a horrible mistake in choosing us. Yes, He will be our God and we will be His children. Yes, we’ll do it! *We promise*. . . . Well, you know what happens. In just a few days, they make plans for a golden calf. And it turns out that 0% was the *high point* in what they were able to do for God! Now they’re working against Him, going from zero to less than zero in record time! Covenant broken – no, *shattered!* Right?

Well, yes – *if its up to us*. If our sonship and adoption is dependent upon our promises, our faithfulness, our efforts, our obedience. And if that's true, its not a matter of a few days, but a few hours, a few minutes, before the sin in our hearts and minds wells up and shatters us. Not loving my neighbor but despising him and his need. My heart and mind filled with pride and self-love. Not loving God but despising what He has given me and how He is working in my life. My heart and mind filled with lust for what I do not have, but want. More stuff. A better family. An easier life. A different job. Fewer troubles. More admiration from those around me. A god to grant my every wish. Those are pretty idols, aren't they? All golden and shiny and attractive.

Now, I don't doubt the sincerity of the Israelites when they made that promise, and I don't doubt your sincerity. Greg's going to make a similar promise in just a few moments, when he's brought into membership in our congregation, and I know he means it! It's our *ability* that's lacking. Our egos making promises that our bodies can't keep.

But if you listened to the reading from Exodus carefully, you will have heard that God's covenant, His promise, is not dependent upon or based upon us, or anything that we promise, or anything that we do. For what did we hear? ***“Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.”*** And like the blood that stained the doorposts of the Israelites in Egypt, causing the angel of death to pass over them, so too the blood of the covenant that stained the clothing of the Israelites *was not their own* (although it should have been!) – but the blood of a substitute, shed **for them**. In Egypt, it was the blood of a lamb. At Sinai it was the blood of oxen. After the golden calf, Moses offered to give his own life and blood to God in place of the people (Ex 32:30ff). But the true blood of the covenant was still to come. The true blood that would secure *all* His promises. true blood that all substitute blood foreshadowed. The blood that would be shed to cover *all* people, of *all* time, to make atonement for *all* sin. The blood that makes us sons of God. The blood that we again see is 100% God, and 0% us.

Which brings us to that day beside the Sea of Galilee, with its many parallels to the Exodus. It is again a wilderness place. There is a mountain and a great crowd of people, and God again miraculously feeds His people, with more than they could eat. And the people, ***“when they saw the signs that [Jesus] had done, said, ‘This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world.’”*** They see in Jesus (rightly!) that He is a prophet *even greater* than Moses. And so they want to make Him their king – but (wrongly!) their bread king. To take care of their every need in this life. To give them not only their daily bread, but their land – their *Promised Land* – again, and restore the nation.

But Jesus withdraws at that notion, because came not to be just a *bread* king, but a *blood* king. He is the prophet greater than Moses, but not because His Law is greater, and not because His bread is greater, or because His miracles are greater – *although that may all be true!* – but because **His blood** is greater. Because His blood is the blood of God, the true substitute, the true blood of the covenant. His is the blood that covers us to make us sons of God. His is the blood that makes atonement for our sins, so that the angel of eternal death passes over us, and we are rescued from our slavery to sin and death, and given life. He took the bullet of death for us and our false, golden gods, so that we might be sprinkled and covered with the blood and water that flowed from His side on the cross. That we be children of God, sons of God, not through *our* promises and efforts (*our* sweat and blood!), but through the forgiveness of our sins in the blood of His cross.

And so that that blood, His blood, might cover us as well – saving us from death, making us sons of God – is why we are here. And it is why (as we heard) God gave the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to His Church (Eph 4:11). To give us Jesus' blood of love and life. To sprinkle us in the blood of His cross in the waters of Holy Baptism, where we are made His children and brought into His family. To cover us in the blood of His cross in the words of Holy Absolution, where the forgiveness of the cross is given to us here and now. And to give us the body and blood of His cross in Holy Communion, where we hear "*This is My blood, of the New Covenant*" – the New Testament, for what the Old could only foreshadow, has now come in Jesus. And in Him, the prophet greater than Moses, the Son of God Himself, **everything is made new**. Our sins and broken promises forgiven. Our shattered hearts and lives restored. Our relationship with God made whole, and holy, again. Still 100% God, 0% us.

And that is the "*equipping of the saints*" and the "*work of the ministry*" and the "*building up of the body of Christ*" that St. Paul is talking about in Ephesians (4:12). He isn't talking about methods and programs and workshops and tools and *making you all that you can be for God!* That's the stuff of modern day psychology and sociology . . . and its falling into the same trap as the Israelites that day at Mount Sinai, thinking that we can do it, we can improve. If we just try hard enough. If we just . . . No, even our lives now, our lives as children of God, are because of His blood. 100% God, 0% us. Apart from Him we can do nothing. (Jn 15:5) But as we are equipped, ministered to, and built up in the gifts of His Word and bloody Sacraments, *then* we are His children; *then* we live new lives of faith and forgiveness; *then* we can begin to do those good works that our Father would have us do. Not to pay Him back or earn His favor, but because **He** is working in us. Because **He** is building His Church. Because **He** is forming us into the image of His Son.

That working of God had a huge impact in the lives of the Israelites, and it has a huge

impact on our lives as well. It doesn't mean that we have a *bread king*, who is going to solve all the problems and difficulties of our lives and give us all we want. There's still going to be struggles, doubts, and fears. There's still going to be wars, and as we all heard again this week, terrorism. But though these things will continue, our *blood king* has assured us that the greatest terrorist of all, who has been at work in our world ever since the beginning, and will be until the very end; who seeks to devour and destroy our lives and drag us down to hell with him – he has been destroyed. And so in the end, we too will enter the Promised Land, of Heaven, and behold God. For like the Israelites, He has chosen us, rescued us, provided for us, fought for us, and died and rose for us. He has done it, 100%. And so He is *The Church's One Foundation* (LW #289), both now and forevermore.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.