

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE – SUNDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2011 – MORNING SERVICE.

Sing beforehand: Psalm 66:6+7.

Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth. Beloved, grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. By the powerful operation of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 107:1+2+4.

Confession of faith: Apostles Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell: The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead: I believe in the Holy Ghost: I believe in the holy catholic church: the communion of saints: The forgiveness of sins: The resurrection of the body: And the life everlasting. Amen.

After the law we confess our sin and pray for forgiveness with Hymn 9-1:1+10+11.

Law

Hymn 9-1:1+10+11.

Prayer

- *Doxology:*
- *Worship:*
- *Confession:*
- *Supplication (for pardon of sins):*
- *Thanksgiving:*
- *Intercession (for the need of the congregation, the church, authorities, sinful world and appeal to the promises of God)*
- *General supplication:*
- *Illumination of the Holy Spirit (necessary for the ministry of the Word):*

Amen.

Psalm 26:1+2+7.

Scripture reading: Leviticus 5:14 to 6:7; Isaiah 53; Matthew 5:23-24.

Text: Leviticus 5:15-16:

The LORD spoke to Moses and said: “When any person commits an offence by inadvertently defaulting in dues sacred to the LORD, he shall bring as his guilt-offering to the LORD a ram without blemish from the flock, the value to be determined by you in silver shekels according to the sacred standard, for a guilt-offering; he shall make good his default in sacred dues, adding one fifth. He shall give it to the priest, who shall make expiation for his sin with the ram of the guilt-offering, and it shall be forgiven him.”

Theme: Sin is a debt that must be compensated and paid.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, grace definitely is one thing that none of us can do without. Consider how it would have been with us if the Lord our God had not been merciful to us. Consider what would have become of us if He had done to mankind what mankind had deserved. There would not have been a single person alive on earth. If the Lord should deal with us according to our trespasses against Him, He should let all of us be damned eternally.

It is only by grace that we may live today. That we may hear that the Lord has forgiven us our sins without us giving or paying anything for our guilt, is grace alone. If we were to define grace, we would say that it means receiving something that we have not deserved. The Lord gives us time to live – time of grace. He forgives us our sins out of grace. And when He forgives us our sins, He treats us as if we had never sinned or had any sin. That is grace in capital letters.

The question the Holy Spirit poses us this morning is: What effect does this grace the Lord shows us have on us? Has a change come into our lives? Or is that which we receive gratis of no value to us? Do we cheapen the grace we receive from God because we receive it gratis? We cheapen God's grace when we quickly say "Thank you, Lord, for forgiving us" but our lives do not prove that we are truly grateful because we simply carry on as before. With the sacrifice for sin the Holy Spirit taught us that the Lord wants to grant reconciliation to everybody. Nobody must ever think that he or she cannot obtain forgiveness of sin from the Lord. With the guilt-offering the Holy Spirit teaches us that we must not make the mistake of thinking that God's grace is cheap.

The guilt-offering, brothers, sisters and children, was to a great extent the same as the sin-offering. Out of the flock a ram without blemish was to be brought. And this ram was dealt with in the same way as in the case of the sin-offering. But, differently from the sin-offering, the ram for the guilt-offering must be valued and have a value in silver shekels. What this value was, we do not know, but Moses and the Israelites knew this exactly although it is not written down for us. If the value of the animal was too low the believer had to make up the difference in money. In addition he had to pay a further 20% of the value.

If the transgression was against the Lord only, the ram, the difference in value and the 20% penalty was handed over to the priest at the Tent of Meeting. If the Israelite had sinned against the Lord by being dishonest to a fellow-countryman, he first had to restore what he owed him plus a penalty of 20% of the value of what he had gained and only thereafter could he bring his ram to the priest at the Tent of Meeting. The priest then made expiation for him by burning on the altar the kidneys, the fat and the lobe of the liver of the ram and the Lord then forgave the Israelite the sin.

Beloved, it is important that we note that the Holy Spirit tells us that when we sin against the Lord or are dishonest towards our neighbour, we act perfidiously towards the Lord. Even when one is inadvertently perfidious towards the Lord, one breaks trust. And a relationship without trust will shatter because you are no longer trustworthy. Our relationship with and our conduct towards our neighbour is never separated or isolated from our relationship with the Lord.

But one cannot only confess one's sin against one's neighbour before the Lord and consider the matter closed. The faithful Israelite could not bring the ram as a guilt-offering without first having settled matters with his neighbour. To beg your neighbour's forgiveness is as important as confessing your sin to the Lord. The debt owed to the Lord cannot be settled unless the debt owed to the neighbour is settled first. On the other hand it is not enough to ask your neighbour for forgiveness and to think that the matter is settled thereby. Your dishonesty to your neighbour was not a sin against him alone but also a sin against the Lord, that is why the Israelite also had to bring his guilt-offering to the Lord.

When the transgression was against a neighbour the restoring of everything plus the penalty of 20% was the price to be paid to restore the relationship to what it was before. But this restoring of everything plus 20% was also the test of determining whether the guilty one was genuine in his remorse and confession. Saying “sorry” is easy and the blood of animals is easily spilt. Neither the words nor the blood show the true purpose in the heart of the guilty one. But the restoring plus the 20% penalty would show whether the guilty person is genuinely desirous of repairing matters.

We will immediately say: “That is true justice!” Especially these days when we suffer from robbers and other felons, we need that kind of justice. Just think – to get back all you lost because of theft or fraud plus 20% of the value on top of that! That one could live with! That is all true, beloved, for that is what the Lord determined should happen. But that cannot be all the Holy Spirit wants to teach us here. Let us hear more.

The Lord starts by speaking of the “dues sacred to the LORD”(New English Bible) or “the LORD’s holy things”(New International Version). Of course, all the utensils and other things at the Tent of Meeting were holy things. So, too, were the parts of the offerings that were due to the priests, holy things. At issue were, therefore, God’s rights. What belongs to the Lord is holy and must be treated as such. In our modern society there are few things people consider sacred. Modern man, with his ostensible wisdom wants to examine and dissect everything cynically and critically. Few people still hold the Bible sacred. Sunday has become to many people simply another day in which to live as any other day. The church is derided and humiliated because in the eyes of modern man it is no longer sacred.

When we say this, we do not intend to return to the way in which Israel lived. We live in the time after Christ and in Him many of the things that Israel was required to do were fulfilled. And something that is sacred or holy is no longer something you may not touch as it was in the days of Israel. Sacred, holy, now means to us that somebody or something is dedicated to the Lord because He claimed him, her or it. The church is the community of holy people because the Holy Spirit sanctifies them. For, the Lord claimed us as His children, therefore our conduct and our words must prove that we belong to the Lord, that we are devoted to Him.

Because we belong to the Lord and are sanctified by His Spirit, everything with which we are concerned, our relationships, the management of our time and money, is also sanctified by Christ. For, the Lord claims our entire life because He made us His children. When I therefore, because of my busy every day, gradually and unintentionally, start to spend less and less time in prayer, less and less time in quiet contemplation of His Word to hear His voice, then I become perfidious in my relationship with the Lord. When because of financial distress I inadvertently reduce my monthly contribution, fail to raise it with the Lord in prayer and think that He must understand that things are difficult at present, then I am perfidious.

When in my relationship with my wife or husband, or children with their parents or otherwise, I am or we are perfidious, dishonest with one another, then I have become perfidious towards the Lord and my neighbour. The trust is broken, because that which Christ has sanctified, was treated by me with disdain as if it were of no value. By this perfidious conduct we are indebted with the Lord and with our neighbour. This debt must be paid and a complete repair must be made.

Beloved, in the eyes of the Lord sin and perfidious conduct are not only something that taints us and renders us unfit to appear in the presence of the Lord. In His eyes sin is also a debt we owe Him and our neighbour when we have broken trust. In His covenanted relationship with us the Lord is our God and through Christ our Father. As children of God we owe Him respect, reverence and love, because He deals with us in love. If I fail to answer the Lord’s love with love, I am in debt with the Lord. If I am dishonest in my dealings with my neighbour I am in debt with him or her and with the Lord. In what way can I as a Christian repay that debt? How will I be able to pay that penalty of 20%

so that my relationship with Him might be repaired completely? How will I be able to repay the debt I owe my wife or husband or children or parents and add the 20% penalty thereto because they have lost all faith in me?

I cannot do it. In fact, nobody is able to pay this debt in full. But the Lord does not leave us in this debt. He shows infinitely great mercy to His debtors. In stead of us, you and I, paying the debt we owe the Lord because we fail to love Him and our neighbour as we should, the Lord Himself comes to pay the debt. God makes His Only Son the guilt-offering that settles our debt completely to the last cent. He nails our acknowledgement of debt to the cross. We are completely redeemed of the debt we owe the Lord.

Yet this wonderful grace of the Lord must not be seen as an impersonal commercial transaction. The debt of my sin is not balanced on the scale by the quantity of blood shed by Christ. The debt of sin is not written up in impersonal balance sheets, but is to be found in a broken relationship with the living God and my neighbour. Such a broken relationship cannot be repaired with money. Only the most terrible suffering and death of Christ, your and my Saviour, is able to remove this guilt so that there is no more enmity between us and God, but that we, as God's own children can, in faith, again hug our heavenly Father and assuredly know that He has forgiven us and forgotten our guilt. It is only this price, paid by Christ, that can cause us to forgive one another likewise. It is only as a result of Christ's offering that the Holy Spirit can remove the pain and discomfort in a repaired relationship between people and can reshape it and build it into a relationship of complete trust and openness. For this to happen we, as true believers, must in faith accept the payment that Christ made on the cross as payment in full for us when we confess our sin.

Brothers, sisters and children, it would appear that Jesus had the guilt-offering in mind when He said to His disciples in Matthew 5:23, **"If, when you are bringing your gift to the altar, you suddenly remember that your brother has a grievance against you, leave your gift where it is before the altar. First go and make your peace with your brother, and only then come back and offer your gift."**

These words from Jesus and the teaching that the Holy Spirit gives us concerning the guilt-offering, makes one wonder: one sometimes senses the absence of the Lord's glorious Presence in public worship, not because the worship is poor or the preaching is insipid or the songs are poorly chosen, but because we, who are present, believe that we can draw the presence of the Lord down to us by our singing and praying whereas we should actually first have made our peace with our neighbour, first have apologised to the one in our family, firstly have restored where I have defrauded someone. The dishonesty and fraud against our neighbour is as bad as our dishonesty and fraud against the Lord when we hardly have time to worship Him in prayer or inadvertently mismanage our finances so that He receives only a slight offering from my daily work. If we start to repair our relationships with other people, might it not be that the Lord blesses us so abundantly that we receive more than we can use?

Beloved, the Lord invites us to test Him, Let us dare to obey Him. Let us not only accept the payment of our debt, but let us add the 20% that the Lord speaks of. How can I give the extra 20%? When I truly follow in the footsteps of Christ and go to make peace where I have been wronged by another and do not wait for him to come to me to set matters right. That repaired relationship which the Lord gives and the trust that returns between you and the other person will be your additional 20% that the Lord returns to you.

The guilt-offering speaks again of the infinitely great mercy of the Lord in which He completely removes our guilt from us. But it definitely is not a cheap grace. It is grace that flows from God's heart to us, red from Christ's cross. This grace runs into our lives, we know how merciful and

gracious the Lord is. That is why we shall aim for it and beseech the Holy Spirit that He change our lives because we were granted grace by the Lord.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing song: Hymn 2-4:1+3.

The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The LORD turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Amen.

Rev Coen Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville
Date: 13 November 2011
Scripture: New English Bible and N I V.