

Thursday, April 1

Today's Reading: Matthew Chapter 27: 1-61

Today's Devotional Message is by Pastor Don Moorman

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he gave up his spirit. [51] At that moment the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Matthew 27:50-51 (NLT)

These few words establish the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Throughout the Old Testament God chose to relate to his people through the priesthood. The priests represented God to the people and the people to God. They were kind of the middle-men between God and his people. The Temple in Jerusalem contained another layer of separation between God and his people. It was divided into two sections. The Holy Place occupied the front part of the building and it was here that priests offered sacrifices for the people and performed their daily priestly duties. Behind this space, separated by a heavy curtain, was the Holy of Holies, the one place on earth where God was present in a uniquely intense way. This space could be entered only once a year and then only by the High Priest. The veil was mute witness to the separation between God and his people.

During his earthly ministry Jesus respected this system but, in a way, he was pointing beyond it. For here he was, God present among his people, with no separation at all. But a new system did not become official until after Jesus had died on the cross. By his death he won forgiveness of sins for all people of all times. He was the last and greatest sacrifice and the instant that sacrifice was complete all separation between God and his people vanished. No more sacrifices were needed and no more separation existed. The torn Temple veil was dramatic testimony to this change. Other religions continued with their priesthoods separating gods from people but not the Christian religion.

This idea of God dealing directly with his people is so revolutionary that even the Christian church has had trouble dealing with it. Within 200 years of the resurrection of Jesus, Christians had resurrected the idea of a priesthood that functioned almost exactly like the Old Testament priesthood. It was not until the Protestant Reformation of the 1500's that a significant part of the Christian church returned to the New Testament model established when the Temple veil was torn.

All of this makes a simple and challenging point. You have direct contact with God. That means you can't shift responsibility for your spiritual life to anyone else. Your pastor can't do your faith for you. Attending worship services doesn't replace your personal responsibility for your relationship with God. You attend to your relationship with God by prayer, Bible study, taking advantage of the spiritual growth opportunities at Joy, serving those in need with the love of Jesus and sharing your faith with others. These last two may surprise you but they're important to growing your relationship with God. Every time you share the love of Jesus and every time you share the Good News of Jesus you exercise your faith. Exercising your faith is like exercising your body. The more you exercise it, the stronger and healthier it becomes. No one can do any of this for you. No one needs to. The torn veil gives witness to that fact.

Prayer: God, give me the strength to accept the privilege and responsibility of developing and deepening my relationship with you daily. In Jesus' name. Amen.