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St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota  
9:00 and 11:15 a.m. Celebrations of Holy Eucharist  
The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost; November 18, 2018

## “Anamnesis”

Scripture: Hebrews 10:11-14 (15-18) 19-25; (Proper 28 B, RCL)

*“Every priest stands day after day at their service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.”*

Wow! Hearing that from the letter to the Hebrews this morning... I sure am glad I'm not a priest. Wait a minute! Of course, I am a priest. I've been in that situation... for over 20 years. I've stood day after day at the altar offering the same prayers and handing out countless pieces of Communion bread, and repeatedly pronouncing forgiveness of sins, and constantly asking the blessing of God on the congregation, each and every time saying something like "...the blessing of God Almighty be with you all... for ever and ever." I mean... if we clergy would get this right, we wouldn't have to come back here every Sunday, would we?

Wait a minute! Don't take that too seriously. Because if all that we are doing here is going through the motions, if none of this really has any impact

upon our relationship with God, none of it really builds up our lives as a people of faith in God, then we really are missing the mark. But I don't believe we are missing the mark. Because I know this... "*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*" indicates no repeat performance, though I've said it some 2,543 times celebrating Holy Communion as a priest in the Episcopal Church. The bread isn't broken in order that Jesus suffers anew with each service of Holy Eucharist. We aren't reenacting the same sacrifice day by day that somehow never takes away our sins.

No... we are remembering what has happened... once for all. "*By a single offering Jesus has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*" And we aren't even really remembering his sacrifice exactly... It's more like we are remembering his body, turning in our minds and hearts to the present experience of his resurrection, hearing and responding continuously and always to his call to become the "body of Christ", to *be* the body of Christ. That's why we gather day by day, week by week... to re-member, to *become* members. To be members again and always with the one who has already made us forgiven and whole.

It's working. It's been such a pleasure for me lately to be in conversation with new and returning members of this faith family of St. Stephen's Church. Nearly always, people comment that it is a sense of community that enlivens them about this church, the feeling that people care about being a part, that we collectively find joy in this life of faith, we look out for one another, we celebrate each others happiness and help carry the load together in times of sorrow. Newer members speak of the "good energy" in this place and in the people. And I'm not surprised, though I am deeply moved and grateful. Because that energy of which people speak is, I believe, a manifestation of the Spirit of God at work in this community, a sign of the covenant put forth by the writer of Hebrews this morning, that God will be in our hearts and minds and remember our sins no more. That's already happened. It's a done deal. I suppose that doesn't mean we don't find new ways to sin. But it's by the old way that we've been forgiven... *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son..."*

So that is why we gather time and time again for the prayers and the bread and the forgiveness and the blessing... because we are beloved of God, and we are forgiven for our sins. We don't come to church to please God, rather we come to church because God is already pleased with us. Not because

we do everything right, but because God chooses to love us. What is broken, God seeks to make whole. We don't just go through the motions here. We make no sacrifice again and again, rather we re-member faithfully the gift of life and love God has already given us in Jesus Christ. And we are responding by doing something of what the writer of Hebrews calls us to do: to come together, to "provoke" one another to love and good deeds, to show encouragement and hope and patient caring as we await the consummation of our lives and our faith.

So, I've spent the better part of the last 48 hours and more with the teens and leaders of the TEC community. I am so grateful for that opportunity. It's so magnificently exhausting. You listen to these young people tell their stories of great struggles, losses, and sadness, along with joy and healing and triumph. Yet all their stories are founded on an understanding, earned at a young and tender age, that life is a challenging journey always accompanied by the unconditional love that comes from God. TEC time reminds me of why I have never tired of standing at the altar, saying the prayers, pronouncing forgiveness, offering blessing. This celebration of faith, this Holy Eucharist, is a *timeless time* when God's love is made evident and present in the simple sharing of bread and wine, love and hope. And this

letter to the Hebrews, calling us to that love and hope, is 2,000 years old, but when I am with you around the altar, it's like it is written to us just now. Because in a very real and timeless way, it is written to us just now. The Wednesday Morning Bible Study just finished an exploration of the letter to the Hebrews, and we learned that the letter (it's a sermon really) was written in a time of great social upheaval and challenge, when the world was changing fast, peace and security were increasingly illusive things, and being a Christian was difficult. So the preacher to the Hebrews calls the faith community to run the race set before it, to lift our drooping hands, strengthen our weak knees, straighten our path, and persevere in the life before us.

*Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter this sanctuary in Edina, Minnesota by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through his own body, his own life... let us approach this altar with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with the pure water of baptism. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful... again and again, and, I'll happily keep repeating it with you... for ever and ever.*