

## Entering the Holy Place Hebrews 10:11-15

Last week, my wife and I flew out to Denver for some leadership training. It was our third time going, so we knew some of the details of traveling there. But since we don't fly much, it's still a challenge sometimes to figure out how to make it through security. I have to leave my keys at home, since they've got a multi-tool with a knife on them. I almost always forget to put all the small bottles containing liquids together in a clear plastic bag. Although it usually goes quickly, it's still somewhat disruptive to have to take off shoes, put everything on the conveyor belt and go through security. Although I know the reasons behind all of the extra security, it's still hard to get through airport security.

It's harder to enter many places now. To go into Hilton or Jack Trice, you need to use a clear plastic bag so security can see what you're bringing in. Schools have limited access points, and you need to get buzzed in and go through the office before you can enter. Even the dorms at Iowa State have narrowed their visitor policies, making it harder for us to visit students there. There seem to be more and more places that are difficult to enter.

This fall, our Sunday morning Bible class has been looking at the Tabernacle, and how it points to Jesus. The Tabernacle was the fancy tent where the Israelites worshiped before the temple was built in Jerusalem. Although it was portable, it had many of the same parts the temple would have. There was an altar for sacrifices. There was a holy area where priests prayed. And there was a Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, where the priest would only go once a year to offer a sacrifice on behalf of the people. Because of its holiness, it was hard to enter. There were several different layers to it, and getting into each subsequent layer had more and more requirements. You had to be a Levite to be a priest. Priests had to go through cleansing rituals before they were allowed to enter and do their duties. They had to make sure to do all the rituals properly, following the detailed instructions given by God. They couldn't go anywhere they wanted, but only where they were supposed to go. They could enter the courtyard, but they couldn't always enter the holy place, and they definitely couldn't enter the Holy of Holies very often, if at all.

The tabernacle was a place of God's presence, which is part of why all of the layers were there. Sinners couldn't just enter into the presence of the holy God. Unclean people couldn't enter into God's presence without being made clean. And so the tabernacle wasn't just the place of God's presence. It was also the site of God's judgment. The Tabernacle was a busy place, just as the temple was, because the sacrifices were almost non-stop. Sacrifices needed to be offered to make up for various sins people had committed, and to thank God for various life events. All of the sacrifices pointed to the people's sins, God's judgement, and what was necessary to atone, to make up for the sins.

The tabernacle was temporary and portable, but the temple was not. The first temple, the one Solomon had built, was impressively built, and people from all over the area came to see its splendor. The second temple, the one Jesus and his disciples walk by in today's Gospel lesson, was by all accounts even more impressive. But they all had the same walls. They all had the same separations. Gentiles, non-Jews, could only go in as far as the court of the Gentiles. Women could only go in as far as the court of women. Good Jewish men could go in further, but only the priests could enter the holy place. And only one priest could enter into the Holy of Holies once a year to offer the sacrifice.

But that wasn't how God wanted to be present with his people. Instead, Jesus came into the world to dwell among us. And Jesus didn't work to keep people away from him because he was too holy for them. Instead, Jesus went to those who were unclean and untouchable, and cleaned them and touched them. He didn't worry about his holiness being lost by being with sinners. Instead, he worked to bring his holiness to sinners.

One of the most impressive features of the temple was the large curtain that guarded the entrance to the Holy of Holies. It served to mark the separation that existed even between the priests and God. When Jesus died, the curtain was torn. Now, instead of priests having to intercede to God on behalf of the people, as well as for themselves, there was a new high priest. Jesus, who offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross for the sins of the world, to end the separations between God and people.

Of course, sacrifices in the temple didn't work as a long term solution for sin. And shortly after Jesus and his disciples walked by, the sacrifices would end. When the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, it changed the course of both Judaism and Christianity. Once there was no temple, the whole idea of sacrifices was gone. But for Christians, this didn't matter, because Jesus was the sacrifice all the other sacrifices pointed to. His sacrifice on the cross was once for all.

It's getting harder to access houses of worship. Shootings at churches and synagogues have led some places to have to increase security or change how people can get in. One of the other pastors in Denver talked about how his church locks all the outside doors 15 minutes after the service starts in order to keep things safe. On the other hand, there's fewer and fewer people who want to go to church, fewer people who make the effort to come to church, no matter how open it is.

So instead Jesus sends us out. Because of Jesus, we have the confidence to approach God. And God gives us the Holy Spirit to give us the confidence to approach others, to share how we who were once unclean have been made clean, to share how a holy, unapproachable God came down to us to be with us because he loves us.

We may have to deal with security when we fly. We may not always be able to enter places as easily as we'd like. But we can be encouraged that because of Jesus we can enter into God's presence wherever we are. What a wonderful feeling that is.

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