

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2018

notes:

## 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Advent

to do: Love God

Love my neighbour

**Red** or **Green**

### Collect

Almighty and eternal God, you have kindled the flame of love in the hearts of the saints: grant to us the same faith and power of love, that, as we rejoice in their triumphs, we may be sustained by their example and fellowship; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

### Hebrews 9:11-14 English Standard Version (ESV)

#### Redemption Through the Blood of Christ

9<sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,<sup>[a]</sup> then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup>he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup>For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify<sup>[b]</sup> for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup>how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our<sup>[c]</sup> conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

**Footnotes:** a. some manuscripts *good things to come*. b. or *For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies*. c. some manuscripts *your*.

**COMMENT:** This brief reading presents another in a long series of arguments for regarding Jesus Christ as the one mediator between humanity and God. It declares the supreme efficacy of Christ's sacrifice on the cross in contrast to the repeated sprinkling of the blood of animal sacrifices on the temple altar customary in the Hebrew tradition. From the internal evidence of this letter, some scholars have concluded that the audience for this whole argument were Jewish Christians who may have been in danger of reverting to Judaism from their recently acquired Christian faith. Others have proposed that these new Christians were not necessarily Jews, but were also in danger of falling away from their earlier confession under the threat of persecution. One Scholar suggests that the recipients of the letter were Christians of the Jewish Diaspora familiar with the scripture and traditions of Hellenistic Judaism in urban centres of the Greek-speaking world. The only clue to the whereabouts of the unknown author is in 13:24 "Those from Italy

send you greetings.”. Hebrews could be described as a book as a series of sermons that alternate between exhortations and applications designed to apply theological insights to practical pastoral situations. For example, in this week’s reading, the author is saying that atonement for sin, the abolishing of guilt, reconciliation with God and sanctification for a new and holy life came through the sacrifice of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer. This is a standard approach to exhortation found in many of the Pauline letters, notably Corinthians and Galatians. The author had an intimate knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures and of the continuity of the Christian faith with those scriptures. He was particularly responsive to the prophetic element in the Old Testament which emphasised the spiritual reality that the living God speaks both judgment and mercy to people with whom God had made an eternal covenant. God’s purpose was to create a faithful people within a renewed creation. This God had accomplished through Jesus Christ, God’s Son, who offered himself as the all-sufficient sacrifice on the cross instead of the repeated sacrifices of the old covenantal system. The task of the Christian believer in this new covenant, therefore, was to accept in faith this new relationship with the living God and to live out this relationship with purified conscience and grateful worship and service in the ordinary round of daily life.

## **Mark 12:28-34** English Standard Version (ESV)

### **The Great Commandment**

12<sup>28</sup> And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?”<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”<sup>32</sup> And the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher. You have truly said that he is one, and there is no other besides him.<sup>33</sup> And to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”<sup>34</sup> And when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And after that no one dared to ask him any more questions.

**COMMENT:** His travelling days done, Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem and confronts strong opposition to his teaching. Unlike Luke who added the parable of the Good Samaritan to this incident, Mark merely used it to summarise the whole of the Jewish law in two brief commandments. The first commandment is the traditional *Shema* from Deuteronomy 6:4. This has been described as “the central confession and self-definition of Israelite belief.”. The scribes response shows how much this expert in the Jewish Law felt at ease with Jesus’ teaching at this point. The second commandment is from a more obscure passage in Leviticus 19:18. There it appears at the end of a long sequence of ritual and moral dictates of the

Holiness Code coupled with the prophetic refrain given as its divine warrant, "I am the Lord." In its Levitical context the commandment has the effect of countering vengeance within one's own extended family or tribe. It is probable that this did not extend to those of another tribe, as many of the Old Testament narratives show. Was that how Jesus understood it too? Or Mark? Or Paul (cf. Gal. 5:14? Or James (cf. Jas. 2:8)? If Mark, Paul and James are representatives of the earliest apostolic tradition as they had received it from Jesus, it is obvious that Jesus provided a universal scope for this commandment than did the framers of the Holiness Code of Leviticus. With these commandments, Jesus offered this expert in casuistry so common in the interpretation of the Law the key to entering God's kingdom he had come to establish. So clear and memorable in their brevity, no one has ever devised a better way to live in the real world than by following these two commandments. As someone had rightly said, it isn't that we don't know how, it is rather a matter of doing what we do know faithfully all the time in all our relationships. When these commandments are faithfully implemented in human affairs, and especially between the members of different religious traditions, the love of God revealed in Jesus would also be disclosed in the historical traditions of others.

### **Psalm 119** *Aleph (A) I* Grail Psalter

#### **℟ They are happy who follow God's Law**

<sup>1</sup> They are happy whose life is blameless,  
who follow God's law!

<sup>2</sup> They are happy who do his will,  
seeking him with all their hearts, ℟

<sup>3</sup> who never do anything evil  
but walk in his ways.

<sup>4</sup> You have laid down your precepts  
to be obeyed with care. ℟

<sup>5</sup> May my footsteps be firm  
to obey your statutes.

<sup>6</sup> Then I shall not be put to shame  
as I heed your commands. ℟

<sup>7</sup> I will thank you with an upright heart  
as I learn your decrees.

<sup>8</sup> I will obey your statutes;  
do not forsake me. ℟

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :  
world without end. Amen.**

**COMMENT:** This particular psalm has some very special characteristics. It is not only the longest in the Psalter, but its divisions are based on an acrostic scheme. In Hebrew, each section of verses begins with a letter of the Alphabet. Each strophe or section consists of eight lines and each line begins with the same letter of the alphabet. In this first strophe the lines begin with the letter *Aleph*. The whole psalm consists of an extended litany to the covenant law of Israel. God is addressed in every one of the one hundred and seventy-six verses. As in no other psalm, love for the LORD's law forms the single, central theme. Worth noting, too, are the different synonyms for the law repeated again and again throughout this strophe: commandments, testimonies, precepts, word, judgments, ordinances. The most common of these synonyms is precepts. The Hebrew word *piqqûd* (pronounced "pik-kood") occurs twenty-one times in Psalm 119 but in very few other Old Testament passages, including the rest of the Psalms. It was defined as a mandate from the LORD and was closely related to a primary verb which meant "to visit" or "supervise." In this strophe the psalmist contemplates the wisdom that comes from study of the law. Consequently, it is safe to conclude that the psalm probably dates from after the reconstruction of the temple in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC when litanies had taken an important place in worship once more and wisdom was becoming an important theme in post-exilic spirituality. A liturgy on the law had an important role to play in the moral instruction of the people long isolated from their traditional religious practices as to the appropriate ways to maintain their relationship with the LORD who had brought them home from exile in Babylon.

### **Short Preface**

And now we give you thanks for the glorious pledge of the hope of our calling which you have given us in your saints; that, following their example and strengthened by their fellowship, we may run with perseverance the race that is set before us, and with them receive the unfading crown of glory.

### **Post Communion**

Lord of heaven, in this Eucharist you have brought us near to an innumerable company of angels and to the spirits of the saints made perfect: as in this food of our earthly pilgrimage we have shared their fellowship, so may we come to share their joy in heaven; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

Christ our King make you faithful and strong to do his will, that you may reign with him in glory; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**