

Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon Text: Hebrews 9:24-28

Theme: “*The cost of sin*”

Grace, peace and mercy to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

There is always a cost in life. Sometimes the cost is small or almost inconsequential, so small in fact that we almost ignore it. Sometimes the cost is so large, we can't ignore and so we are forced to deal with the reality of the cost.

Dealing with sin means a heavy price must be paid. In a culture in which sin is minimalised, in which we are told more and more, “it doesn't *really* matter”, we can forget that sin costs us our relationship with God. Sooner or later, whether we like it or not, every person needs to deal with the reality of sin in *their* life and consider what the cost is to them personally. They must ask themselves, “What is the cost of sin”?

Heavenly Father, sanctify us in the truth, your Word is truth. Amen.

There's always a cost

I want to begin this sermon with a story – one about the cost of things. Now I began my ministry here in Cairns nearly four years ago and I can remember fairly soon after I was installed, Sonja, the boys and I were invited to Peter and Patricia Schmidt's house for a BBQ and even at that early stage I heard how Patricia was *very* eager for Peter to install some new doors into their house. A couple of nice French doors if I remember correctly. Now I didn't realise that by this stage Patricia had already been asking Peter for a *long* time for her new doors. The cost of these doors would be Pat's patience to keep nagging..., no I mean, to keep encouraging Peter that the doors really would be a nice thing for them to enjoy. There is a cost. For Peter there was to be a cost – many years of nagging..., no I mean the endurance of Patricia's encouragement, knowing that it wouldn't ever be as simple as just hanging a couple of new doors. There is a cost.

Well after many years, Pat is getting her doors, but not only that, a bigger lounge room, bigger bedrooms, and a new roof. The first cost has been paid, but now there is another cost – that of providing sandwiches and cold beers to the volunteers who are helping with the work. You see in this world, just when we think one cost has been paid out, we often find there is another cost just behind it. There is a cost and often it seems as though the bill keeps on going up.

The cost of sin

In our sanitised world which often includes our sanitised church we can easily forget the price God determined for the sins of humanity. A brief re-reading of the laws given, particularly in Leviticus, will remind you of the bloody cost to be paid. To our ears today, it seems terribly bloody and gory that so much animal blood must be spilled in order that people may be right before God. I still remember the first time I read these laws about bloody sacrifices that they just didn't seem to make sense and that I was so thankful we live in the New Testament times, not the Old Testament. You see, there are offerings to be made for peace, offerings to be made for sin, offerings to be made for guilt and then there are different regulations for how different offerings are to be made and at what time. Each of these offerings involved the death of an animal to pay the price for a person or families atonement so they can live in God's presence. The culmination of the whole system of sacrifices was that the High Priest would be able to enter the Most Holy of Holies once each year and be in the presence of God's dwelling place on earth.

Even since Adam and Eve sinned, God's warning of death has come true. The wages of sin is death and each person does die but God in his grace and wisdom allows us to live our allotted span of life. The price for this life was the death of sacrificial animals who carried the punishment that was due to the individuals and families who offered these sacrifices. There is a cost of sin and that is death and it is a cost that must always be paid.

Christ – the final sacrifice

The problem with the system of sacrifices given in the Old Testament is they had to be continually performed and they were limited to a time and place. Even though these rituals were given to the Israelites by God, they were to be performed by people, complete with all their weaknesses. It is into this limited system of sacrifice, enacted by the Jewish priests that Jesus begins his ministry, teaching the people that the Kingdom of God has now begun.

Our New Testament reading describes Christ entering not only the holy places made with human hands but indeed heaven itself. Jesus appears before God himself to intercede on our behalf as our great High Priest. The difference between Jesus' service and those of the Jewish priests is that they had to keep coming back, they had to keep making the proper sacrifices for not only the sins of the people, but also their own sins. Human works will always be limited whereas Jesus appeared once and for all.

The cost of sin remains death but now Jesus has paid this final terrible cost for all people. Now longer do individuals need to offer a sacrifice so they can live in God's presence. Had Jesus not died on the cross that would have been our morning ritual. Today you would have brought your sacrifices and we would have witnessed the slaughtering of the beasts upon the altar. But because Jesus has died in our place, we hear the stories of his perfect sacrifice and we are cleansed in the renewal of our baptism whenever we ask God to forgive us. When you hear the pastor's voice proclaim that you are forgiven *all your sins*, it is not he who forgives you but Jesus himself.

There is a cost of sin and that is death and it has been paid in full by Jesus' death on the cross.

Jesus – Life everlasting

The psalm for this week is Psalm 146 and there is a powerful contrast made between the work of people and the work of God. It is a psalm of praise for the work of God. It is in God that we can put our hope and trust, it is the Lord who will reign forever. It is the Lord who knows the needs of his people, from the highest to the lowest and everyone in between. Against the permanence and certainty of God, the psalmist says, "Don't put your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish." We are reminded here that no matter how good our plans may be, no matter how good a leader we might have, no matter how many resources we think we have at our disposal, human plans and human leaders will always be limited by a time and place. Once a person leaves or once a person dies, all you have are the memories, maybe a good example – but no more work. People can't be in all places and at all times.

But we have a great High Priest who is in all places and at all times. Jesus himself says he is the Alpha and Omega. He was there when the earth was created and he will return at the end of the age to call all who are baptised and believe into the place prepared for them in heaven. In Christ we can place our trust for our salvation and for our children, their children and future generations yet to be born.

There is always a cost in life, sometimes a small cost, sometimes it is almost too great to imagine. Each one of you will have your own dreams and desires and you will work out the cost and whether you are prepared to pay this or not. But one cost that every person must eventually face is the cost of sin, which is death. We will either attempt to pay that on our own, or you will trust that Jesus has already paid this cost in full.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! We will praise the Lord as long as we live; we will sing praises to God while we have our being. We will trust in Jesus as our great High Priest who has paid the cost of our sins and the sins of the world.

Amen.