

PASTOR'S PEN: "Sanctum"

The Book of Exodus includes the narrative account of how *Jahweh* gave His law to the children of Israel, His chosen people. Most of us can recite from memory the story of Moses on the mountaintop, receiving the Decalogue – the Ten Commandments – from the hand of God Himself. But God did much more at Sinai than create a list of ten specific laws. He also created a national government for His people, including many, many other laws. More importantly, He set forth a detailed system of worship for them. At the center of Hebrew worship would be the Tabernacle, for which God provided explicit specifications regarding its construction and furnishing. And at the heart of the Tabernacle was the *sanctum sanctorum*, the Most Holy Place, where God would physically dwell with His people.

The Holy of Holies was holy in every sense of the word: sacred – set apart by God for His specific purposes and consecrated wholly to Him. So holy was the *sanctum sanctorum* that it could be entered only by the High Priest, even then only after he had undergone an elaborate cleansing process, and even then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement.

When the great Temple was built in Jerusalem, it was likewise consecrated according to the specifications of *Jahweh*, who designed it to replicate the wilderness Tabernacle. Once again at its heart stood the Most Holy Place, separated from the rest of the structure – and from God's people – by an enormous curtain, and entered into only by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

That would change. The account of our Lord's crucifixion in the Book of Matthew includes this notation:

And, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were split. Matthew 27:52 KJV

Thus did God announce one of the most amazing elements of His New Covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ. ALL who were called by God would now be granted immediate access to His presence. The Spirit of God would have no more need of the Holy of Holies; He would from thence enter the heart of every person who would come to God through faith in Jesus Christ. God would dwell within His church as an *imminent* presence.

This access to God provides for us at least three remarkable privileges.

- As His adopted sons and daughters, Christians have been invited by our Lord to call *Jahweh* "Father", something at that time unthinkable to Old Testament Jews.
- As believer-priests, we can come into His presence with our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving, and we may do so without an intermediary priest, at any time, day or night.
- We can pray directly to God – boldly, in Jesus' name –personally laying our petitions and supplications at the foot of His throne and uttering our confessions directly to Him.

I have no doubt that the first Christians, nearly all of whom Jews, were constantly amazed by this new access to God, who had for them been only *transcendent*, far above them in every sense: invisible, unapproachable, almost remote. Indeed, their forefathers had been terrified at the prospect of His so much as actually speaking directly to them (See Exodus 20:18-21.), much less being “caught” in His immediate presence (See Isaiah 6:1-7.).

I fear that many Christians in the present day, however, have come to take our access to God for granted. Our great freedom in Christ causes us, from time to time, to forget His holiness and, in so doing, to lose our sense of reverence and awe when we come before Him. How long has it been since you approached His invoked presence with fear and trembling? Or with so much as prayerful awareness of His divine “other-ness”? We are right to celebrate the fact that the nature of our relationship with God has been changed dramatically by Jesus Christ, but we must remember that God Himself has not changed: He is still the High and holy One, Lord Sabaoth, the great God above all gods, the Sovereign Creator of the Universe.

*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty,
which was, and is, and is to come. Revelation 4:8 KJV*

It is my desire that, with the move to an honest-to-goodness church building (in just two short weeks, *Dv!*), we each of us begin to prayerfully adjust our attitude in regards to our entrance into the sanctuary each Sunday morning. It is our intention that the Worship Service begin promptly at 10:15, but I like the idea of reserving the sanctuary as true *sanctum* from 10:00 until that time. Those who would enter the sanctuary during this interim (ALL of us, I hope) should do so quietly and reverently, and should retain that attitude until the service begins, embracing these moments as holy before God in silent reflection and confession before our weekly “season” of praise and worship.

We have been good about this before the ministration of Communion each month, particularly careful – most of us – about approaching the Lord’s Table only after proper preparation. I am glad for this, and have been grateful for the worshipful silence during the reception of the elements. It would be good for us to affect the same spiritual posture each Sunday between 10:00 and 10:15. Parents, this discipline presents an excellent opportunity to begin the instruction of your children in matters of God’s holiness. Indeed, this holy silence can become a weekly review tutorial in this regard for all of us.

For the past months our service has begun at around 10:15 with a completely informal time of announcements. This, I think, should change. Bulletin boards will be mounted in the narthex and will be constantly updated in regards to information important to the COS family. The casual visiting so dear to us on Sunday mornings will, I hope, be transferred to the Fellowship Hall, where coffee and light refreshment could be made available after the service each week.

Let us purpose to learn the disciplines of silence, solitude, and meditation before the service each week. It will be good for us, Beloved.