

**Sunday, November 4, 2018 – Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost and All Saints’
Observed**

“Purified for a Purpose”

Hebrews 9: 11-15

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Process Structure

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

There’s a scene near the end of that bastion of great depth and wisdom – Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark – where our archeologist hero Indiana Jones finally locates a most rare and precious find – the ancient Israelite Ark of the Covenant. The whole movie is about the effort to find this Ark.

The Ark was the most holy object in the Most Holy Place in the most holy site on the surface of the earth. This gold covered wooden chest contained the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the rod of Israel’s first High Priest, Moses’ brother, Aaron, a gold jar filled with manna that sustained the Israelites in the wilderness. At first this ark traveled with itinerant Israel in the wilderness, occupying a tent at the center of camp called The Tent of Meeting. Moses would enter this tent to talk with God, His voice coming from between two gold cherubim affixed to the top of the chest. Fast forward four and a half centuries – King Solomon is instructed to build a temple in Jerusalem. The Ark sets in the Most Holy Place in that temple, the Holy of Holies. This is God’s throne room on earth. The Ark of the Covenant is His Mercy Seat, the earthly throne itself of Israel’s holy, living God. Fast forward another four hundred years to 586 BC – the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem, destroy the temple, and all records of the ark and its whereabouts disappear forever... setting up the plot for the “Lost Ark.”

I tell you all this to make the point – true, Indiana Jones has about as little trustworthiness for historical accuracy as the History Channel shows that peddle conspiracy theories and “history” of UFOs, but it gets one thing very right – the holiness of God. All my current and former Confirmands, forgive me for your hearing this story for the tenth time. One of the bad guys, a Nazi archeologist opens up the Ark and peers inside. With the best special

effects 1981 can buy, the glory of God shines blindingly out of the Ark as the Nazi guy's face melts through screams of agony.

You might think melting face Nazi guy is a ridiculous Hollywood stretch but theologically speaking, it's actually pretty solid. God is holy. He is different, set apart. The things of God are not to be trifled with... when the Philistines stole the Ark in 1 Samuel, plagues of tumors and boils and mice followed from city to city on a seven month long tour of misfortune. Hastily it's returned to land occupied by the tribe of Judah in the region of Beth-Shemesh – there, out in the open as Israelites are worshipping God 70 Israelite men are struck dead for having the audacity to gaze into the Ark, peering into the holiness of God – sinful, unclean people will be annihilated at coming into contact with God's holiness that judges sin.

Uncomfortable? Feel like you need to be careful? This is precisely the fearful reverence that governs the Most Holy Place in the temple in Jerusalem. The writer to the Hebrews speaks of the Christ, the Messiah coming as the High Priest. The original audience of this letter, Hebrews who believe Jesus to be the Messiah risen from the grave on Easter morning have a lot of freight attached to the High Priest. They know the High Priest as the one who enters the Most Holy Place, only on one day a year, Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, only after extensive ritual purification, only with the blood of goats and bulls and the burnt offering of the heifer, their blood let in punishment for the sins of the people and only on that day and by that man in that moment in the Holy of Holies is any Hebrew to utter, in reverent awe, to whisper the personal name God revealed to Moses and printed all over the pages of the scrolls but never to be said, because it, like that Holy of Holies and like the Mercy Seat Ark of the Covenant, is too holy for sinful human lips.

And Jesus, a new High Priest does something different than all the High Priests over all the centuries dating back to Aaron, Moses' brother. He enters a greater, more perfect, more holy space, not made by human hands. It wasn't through the sacrifice of animals and the death penalty taken out on their blood that He is holy to step into the presence of the Father, but

through His own. How much more, through the blood of God's own Son, perfect in every way and dying for the sins not of one people or over one year, but for all people of all nations and all times past, present and future, offered Himself as the sacrifice.

Jesus does all this not to purify Himself, as if He needed to be purified – but to purify you and me – from the tyranny of our own consciences, hopelessly trying to scrub ourselves clean to be holy and presentable enough and never getting there. That endeavor leads to death. Jesus does all this to make us holy.

On All Saints' Day we observe the miracle that sinful creatures like you and me, no more worthy to gaze upon God's presence than those 70 in Beth-Shemesh are purified through the sacrifice of our High Priest, Jesus. That purification is so complete, so all-encompassing that those who die in Christ, unworthy and unclean as they are on their own are received as holy by God. Saints, we call them – saint and holy are synonyms, they mean the same thing... a saint is a holy person. Those who have gone before you in the faith, purified through Jesus are saints. They worship at God's heavenly throne and when they gaze at Him, they are blessed.

You, too. I tell it to you, every time we gather to worship – we connect the words the High Priest Aaron spoke over Israel to the sacrifice the High Priest Jesus made on the cross – the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you – the Lord look upon you with His favor and give you His peace.” If you're not sanctified, purified, made saints me saying “The Lord make His face shine on you” would be cursing you to the fate of melting face Nazi guy. Covered by the blood of Jesus' sacrifice, it's the blessing of God's forever favor and peace to you. Jesus makes us priests. We, undeserving as we are get greater intimacy with God every day than even the High Priest at the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, trembling to whisper the name God shared that in Jesus we're now all purified to speak – Yahweh.

We're given this all for a purpose. Really, it's the same purpose God gave Israel – that all the world would be blessed. We're called to serve the living God. Jesus quoted from our Old

Testament text in Deuteronomy 6 earlier today, summing up God's good and holy will for our lives – "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

This isn't how you *get* holy – this is how you live because you *are* holy. And when you *aren't* holy because you're at the same time a sinner on this side of Jesus' return, we again marvel and praise God at the miracle that the sacrifice of our High Priest was for all sins of all times – we turn and confess, and God forgives again.

Saints of God, through Jesus you're set free from the shackles of past failures, of our consciences that drag us into death – and every day is another day live in God's amazing grace. You have been purified for a purpose. Love God, serve your neighbor, freely and without burdened consciences about your being not good enough, or you'd better or else – but simply because this is who God has made you. In Jesus' name, Amen.