

- Communion service

Introduction

- Trip to Hunterston as a teenager...
 - all the warning signs; still in the cold war; nuclear power was awe-inspiring, scary;
 - it was clear this was a place where danger lurked!

Too hot to handle?

- Leviticus is a manual for handling radioactive material...
 - everywhere there are signs: don't touch, keep out
 - dangerous stuff - and far from boring!!
 - not to be trifled with!
- And when we read the Gospels with this background, events there become all the clearer and more wonderful:
 - curtain in the Temple - no entry sign! - torn in two - and way to God's presence is blazed open
 - makes that event all the more wonderful
 - when you know how hard something is, you appreciate it that much more
- Leviticus opens the eyes of our hearts to the wonder of what Christ has done for us!
 - we are now allowed, daily, moment by moment, to do what the High Priest alone could do once a year!
- First section of book is "manual of sacrifice" (chps.1-7)
 - (burnt, cereal, sin, guilt, peace)

Chapter 1 in particular about burnt offering:

- three different, parallel kinds;
 - vs.3-9 about animals from the herd - cattle
 - vs.10-13 about animals from the flock - sheep, goats
 - vs.14-17 about birds - dove, pigeon
- Essentially same things are said in each case:
 - worship accessible to all; demands the best; fully given over
 - the differences - eg only the sacrifice from the herd (cow) is explicitly said to be acceptable as an atonement - are down to avoiding repetition, and we can infer that where general, comments are applicable across all of the burnt offerings
- There are three really important things that we shouldn't miss here, in the midst of the details of a long-gone sacrificial system:

Divine Initiative

- First, notice that God takes the initiative (v.1)
 - not Moses sitting down and thinking "how on earth, after Golden Calf and all the complaining are we going to enter the presence of God?"
 - God took the first step towards us...
- Made by the priest - not something the worshipper can do for himself (v.5, etc)
- God took initiative in reaching out to us:
 - all the way back in history, it was God who acted;
 - He called Abraham; He called Moses and the people out of Egypt; He instigated the legal and sacrificial systems; He sent the prophets, to no avail
 - He came in Jesus to this earth; He lived; He died
 - *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Human Response

- Second, notice that there is a requirement for human response:
- True worship is not something that can be done for you:
 - need to participate!

- God gave the system, opened the door, but it was the worshipper who brought the animal for the sacrifice!
 - worship is not a performance...
 - human response to what God has done, to his approach, is required
 - *"he is to offer a male without defect..." (v.3,10,14)*
 - who is **he** ? the worshipper, not the priest!!
- This is still the same for us today!
 - compare Romans 12:1: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."*
 - in view of the sacrifice Christ has made for us, we respond, presenting ourselves as living sacrifices

Wonderful Consequence

- Third and final aspect of this ancient sacrificial system that still has something to say to us is this:
- The sacrifice was accepted on behalf of the worshipper to make atonement, to (literally) **"cover over"** sin, to wipe the slate clean
 - that was the **consequence** of the worshippers **response** to the **divine initiative**
- Hebrews 9 summarises some of the regulations of the old covenant, the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and so on.
- Then we have these verses:
 - *(Hebrews 9:7-9) But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time....*
- Two things:
 - first, clearly, the old regulations are abolished now that Christ has come and the Temple is gone
 - second, and more importantly, the OT writings containing those regulations are even more relevant for us than for the original readers - for we live in the age of the full fulfillment of what they pointed towards!
- So, for us too there is a wonderful consequence that follows from sacrifice, a **consequence** that comes as we **respond** to **divine initiative....**
- For in communion we celebrate one who:
 - became our High Priest, able to make the sacrifice on our behalf
 - became the sacrifice himself, **bringing us atonement**
- **So let us respond to the divine initiative!**