

“He Chose to Forgive Us”

A couple of weeks ago, I received this bracelet in the mail. My older sister had made it for me. It is made from the buttons in my mom’s button box. Growing up, my mom **made all of our clothes** – dresses for church, shorts and shirts, prom dresses, slacks. I can look at the bracelet and remember some of the outfits. As I look at the bracelet – I can almost hear the **sewing machine**, I can see the red **pin-cushion** with the little green strawberry dangling from it. I picture her **capable hands guiding and pushing** the fabric through the needles. These symbols - the buttons - carry so many precious memories of my mom.

You have things too – special pieces, **scraps of your experiences** that remind you of people, places, experiences that can no longer be seen. Mark Nepo says **symbols are living mirrors of the deepest understandings that have no words** (“The Book of Awakening”). It can be something as small as a button that when touched carry the most poignant meaning for us – some symbols almost have **special powers**. All we have to do is **touch them** to be comforted with memories of peace.

We have been talking about symbols, about the **gifts of the cross** — symbols like **thorns, nails**, and the **cross itself** that help us remember what difference Jesus makes. **Forgiveness. Atonement** (nails fix broken things). He hid our sins and covered them with his blood. The broken places in us – the **list of our sins** that threatens to separate us from God is between Jesus’ hands and the cross. Covered.

Today, the symbol is **Jesus’ garment**. It was **seamless, woven in one peace from top to bottom**. Why is that important? We know from the Old Testament (Ezekiel 44:19) that the **High Priest** wore such a garment at **Passover time**. Actually, without the garment, the priest was not fit to serve. This is to point us to the fact **that Jesus is the High Priest** – in fact, he is both the **High Priest** and the **Lamb to be sacrificed**. Jesus was crucified “at the sixth hour”. That was the **very hour in which the High Priest began the slaughter of the Passover lambs in the Temple** (John 19:14).

We read in He Chose the Nails, “Jesus’ character was seamless:

Coordinated.

Unified.

Uninterrupted perfection.”

The **character of Jesus had no flaws**, let alone a seam.

What happened at the cross is that Jesus – before he was nailed over our list of sins – **took off that seamless robe and put on our street clothes**. Our church sign today says, “Morally, how do you dress yourself?”

What clothes (wardrobe) would Jesus have swapped us for?

Shirt of shame.

He was stripped in front of his mother.

Feet covered in failure.

It appeared that those in charge had defeated Jesus and his disciples.

Pants of pride?

The masses didn’t need anyone to show them a better way.

He put on ... **sin**. (I Pet. 2:24). He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness”. He **wasn’t actually clothed that day** – but do you **have the image of him putting on all that was ours – so that we might put on all that was his?**

Living on this side of the cross – under the grace of Jesus’ death, I ask you, “**morally, how do you dress yourself?**” About a month ago, there was a gathering of folks who came to hear what “**Choose Civility**” was all about. They took a pledge that said, “**I pledge to conduct myself in a way that is honest, respectful, considerate and kind, even toward those with whom I disagree.**” We ended up with a stack of business cards here at Grace with that pledge on it. I fully support the effort. The pledge, if followed will **change our community**. But I have to say, “can you believe that we have gotten to the point where that isn’t a given?” If my mom – you know the **keeper of the buttons** – had an inkling that I wasn’t **living under the truth of that pledge** – I would be in so much trouble!

But the truth is that no amount of trying ... and intending ... and starting over ... makes me righteous in God’s eyes. Only the blood of Jesus has made me worthy to approach the throne of God. Galatians 3:13 says, “**He changed places with us.**” He did. And he **changed clothes with us** so that we could be **covered in his “seamless” right standing with God** – covering himself in our ... mess.

That is **not all that happened at the cross**. The scripture this morning from Hebrews talked about the way the **Israelites place of worship** was to be set up. The **outer fence** was 7 ½ feet high, 150 feet long and 75

foot wide (about ½ of a football field). The **Jewish people were allowed in this space.**

The outer fence had a gate on one end.

The opposite end had a tent.

Between the gate and the tent were the **courtyard's sacred objects** – all made of **bronze**. For instance, the altar where the sacrifice took place was in here. In the **Old Testament, a believer could only get so close to God, then he or she had to be represented by a priest or the high priest the rest of the way.** They believed God was in the tent.

The tent, inside the outer fence was 45 feet by 15 ft. This was called the tabernacle. It was **separated into 2 rooms by a veil**. The first room was the **Holy Place** (30' by 15'). In it was the **lampstand** (which the priests had to keep burning 24/7 – the only source of light), the **table**, and the **consecrated bread** (which was eaten every Sabbath by the priests inside the Holy Place, and replaced with new loaves.

The **Holy Place is where priests conducted rituals to honor God.** Common worshippers did not enter the tent – only the priests. Inside the **tabernacle tent**, close to God, all the furnishings were made of **precious gold**. The Holy Place ended at the veil, separating another room from sight.

The inner room, through the veil, was the **Most Holy Place**, 15 feet by 15 feet. This is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. This area was the very heart of the entire Israelite camp. This is **where the physical presence of God could be found** – so they thought. No one came in here, except the High Priest – once a year.

What difference does Jesus make? Hebrews 10:11 says, **“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”** Jesus' life, death, and resurrection removed all of the invisible barriers. All of those years of **KEEP OUT, curtain-draped messages said that God is too holy for the ordinary guy or gal to approach.**

God is too holy.

You are too sinful.

End of story.

But Jesus wrote another chapter. Jesus came to earth as **fully God** – and **fully human** to **remove any barriers that the world, or our life might put up.** Matthew 27:50-51 says at Jesus' final moments on the cross, **“And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”** I don't know how it worked, but the veil ... the curtain 30' by 30'

– 4 “ thick, **tore in two from top to bottom.** From the top – just like Jesus **seamless robe** – from God came the perfect sacrifice – **JESUS – to remove anything that would keep us from being in the presence of God.**

Hebrews 10:19 says, “Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain (which is Jesus’ body), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assistance of faith.

Jesus did this for us. Jesus sacrifice gave us full access to the presence of God. And we know it – that is why we are here today. But **what we know and what we understand leaks** – especially when life tries to convince us to believe that we aren’t worthy **We mess up and life drops a heavy curtain that separates us from God.** That is a lie – **nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing.**

We meet many folks who have the veil still firmly in place:

- I can’t look at God’s disappointment or anger.
- I am waiting until I can get my act together.

Our kindness to others is a way of showing that door is open and God is inviting. **Shame. Guilt. Sin.** God has already nailed those to the cross and is welcoming all to enter. How we love and care for others might be the first look into that Holy Place that some people have seen. **Your welcome – points to God’s welcome.**

My life is not seamless. But because I wear the garment of salvation, I can start each day dressed like Jesus. And that is Good News. Amen?
Amen