

Pentecost 25 – November 10, 2024
Text: Hebrews 9:24-28
Theme: Measured Twice and Cut Once

When I was in 7th grade shop class, I learned from Mr. Aurelius to measure twice and cut once. It's funny how simple that old adage is, but how hard it is to follow. Over the years, I have thrown away many pieces of wood and far more paper because I measured only once and cut wrongly. It is a far better thing to get it right the first time and every time I botch the cut, I see Mr. Aurelius sitting behind his workbench shaking his head at me like I was a dog who just piddled on the floor.

Some Christians remind me of this old adage because they don't seem to be certain of their measurements. What I mean is that there are Christians who are unsure of their salvation. They are unsure if they will make the cut, so to speak. If you ask them if they are saved, they will say something like "I sure hope so." Do they think God messed up when it came to them? Did He fail to measure accurately when it came to their particular sins, and Jesus' death on the cross didn't quite cover them? No, we know that Jesus' death and damnation paid in full for every sin ever to be committed.

People don't think God was a sloppy savior. What they think is this. They think that their salvation depends, at least partly, on them. No Christian would be so crass as to say that they think that

they are their own saviors, but that is exactly what he is saying when a Christian says "I'm not sure I'm saved." If it depended on human beings, I would have no confidence whatsoever in salvation. We, human beings can't get the order right at the fast-food drive-through much less save souls. But it does not depend on human beings. Your salvation depends solely and completely on God.

The author of Hebrews says,

"For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."

He did not enter a temple built by human beings to save us. Having been damned to Hell, He marched directly into Heaven and faced God Almighty on our behalf. He pled our case, and of course, we were guilty. But he had given His own life and soul in payment for our lives and souls. He did it exactly once, and he did it for all of us. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are not re-sacrificing Christ. That is done. We are remembering what He sacrificed for us and receiving through our mouths the very body and blood that paid for our sins. That "remembering" changes us.

Now nothing happens as fast as we would like it to happen or the way we would like it to happen. The widow of Zarephath and her

son were not eating steak and potatoes all that time during the famine. They ate bread and water. They were still poor, living in a cramped little house now with a prophet of God as a roomie. Imagine if I showed up on your doorstep this afternoon and said, "Hey, I'm going to be living with you for a few months and by the way, we're going to be eating bread that you bake and drinking nothing but water until God says different." It would be a hard wait. I'd be thankful that I wasn't dying of starvation but I cannot say that I would be thrilled with God's plan, unless it was at Marilyn and Frank Felz's home and lemon bars count as bread. But, in time, it all worked out. Rain came, God used Elijah to raise the widow's son from the dead, and presumably everything went back to normal.

Likewise, the Lord works on us. We are in a famine right now. We don't have a food famine, not yet anyway. We have a God famine. We are torn by a God who demands our full attention and a world that keeps trying to pull us away. We come here and we are told that Christ has taken care of everything. We are on our way to the Promised Land and our ticket has been punched! But what if the leaders of this country do something stupid and we end up in WWII? What if the price of food goes so high that we really do have a famine? What if I get bad grades or a bad review at work? What if that person I love leaves me, or worse, dies?

And so it goes. We all but forget that nothing can truly harm us. Our ticket is punched and we are on the way to the Promised Land. We get distracted. Is the trip to the Promised Land in a luxury limousine? Well, I can't speak for all of you, but my trip is definitely not in a limo. My trip has been more like the backseat of a 1995 Geo Prism. But at least it hasn't been walking the whole time, or riding in the back of a cattle car. We grow tired of bread and water. But that is exactly why Jesus nourishes us with His body and blood. That is why He refreshes us with baptismal waters. That is why He encourages us with His Word. The wait is what wears us down. The wait is where all the trouble happens.

The author of Hebrews knew that. He was writing to Christians of different backgrounds, some Jewish, some Gentile and they thought that Jesus would be back in a few days. But it had been years, and no Jesus! So, the Jews had begun to slip back into their legalism and the Gentiles might have been pining for the good old days worshipping at the temple of Zeus where the food and the partying were so much fun. The author of Hebrews knew that he had to convince them that the wait was worth it. Jesus had measured twice and cut once and it was perfect. Just wait!

That is where we still are today. We wait. We know that Jesus, a carpenter like His earthly father, has constructed our salvation

perfectly. We know that the road will be hard and the conditions will sometimes be abysmal. But we know that paradise awaits us. So, we do what we can to help people through the wait. We encourage one another. We share our resources. We gather together to sing, pray, and praise God and we wait. The day will come when the famine will be over and we will find ourselves feasting at God's banqueting table.