

**Sermon**  
**Sunday, Aug. 28, 2022**  
**The Rev. Stuart L. Seelman**

To be a Christian is to talk about a body, which means you also have to talk about blood.

This is nothing that strange, really.

Most detective novels begin with a body. In most cases, the cause of death isn't that messy: a poison apple or asphyxiation or blunt force trauma. But even in those cases, the carpet probably needs to be replaced or at least deep-cleaned due to the blood.

A detective novel will start with the discovery of a body and then they try to find the *\*some\**body responsible.

Christians also start with a body. But that body, the body of Christ, isn't right in front of us in the drawing room with Colonel Mustard and the candle stick. And on some level, *\*we're\** the somebody responsible for that.

So, is it more like Schrodinger's cat? That's that thought exercise that says if a cat is in a box, and you don't know if it's alive or dead, you have to assume that it's both at the same time. Far less messy.

But, this body, it's no longer in the box. (It *\*was\** dead and it's *\*now\** alive and it just didn't stay in that box) *But just where is it and why did it leave such a mess behind?*

First, we have to look at the scene of the crime. Where we find an apple.

In the Book of Genesis, an apple is eaten in the first generation and in the second we find blood, Cain's blood, crying out from the ground.

This is a pattern that repeats. In our reading from the prophet Jeremiah, God tells Jeremiah.

That Israel followed God into a land not sown and *\*it\** became the first fruits of the harvest. And God tells Jeremiah, those who ate of them were held guilty and disaster came upon them.

In a sense, the people Israel became the apple in Eden's garden. And for those from surrounding nations tempted to persecute them, blood soon followed.

And when Jeremiah repeats God's words to the people, he tells it a bit differently

He tells the people: that God led them through the barren wilderness to a land that \*was already\* plentiful/bountiful. And \*they\* were the ones to defile it. They defiled themselves.

They ate the apple. So, we can guess that blood is soon to follow.

Because blood appears when the boundary lines between our bodies fall apart. Blood binds us to each other, for good and for bad.

In ancient Israel, blood was powerful. It took a central role in the Temple in animal sacrifices. There are all sorts of theories for why they sacrificed animals on the altar, none of them sufficient on their own.

One way of thinking puts it that the animal represents the whole society: its wounds represented society's wounds, and that sacrificing it on the altar could somehow lay them bare to be repaired.

Or one theologian writes that "and the Temple (in the center of the city) \*re-encloses\* the blood poured out, to make it interior to a new and large whole, a new social body to reunite a separated people."

These days, we're a bit more squeamish around blood. We have good reason to treat it as a health hazard. And this animal sacrifice doesn't really make much sense to us. It might appear uncivilized and backwards, violent and magical (and not in the Disney princess sense).

In the Old Testament, there many different, meticulous sets of instructions on how this sacrifice was to be carried out in different places and occasions. And these precise instructions are interspersed among all of the other instructions on food practices and how the courts were supposed to run, and how the people were to best live.

It points to a truth we can't get away from, even if we'd rather leave Schrödinger's cat in the box. The flow of blood from the dying always has to do with how the living go on living.

In our reading from the closing of the Letter to the Hebrews, the writer gives us his own set of instructions for how Christians are to live.

First, welcome the stranger, for by doing so others have welcomed angels unaware. This is probably supposed to be Abraham who welcomed three angels who told him about his wife's pregnancy.

Second, remember those in prison, those who are being tortured, as though you were in their place. Here we might think of Moses, who bound himself to his people in bondage, even though he was the adopted son of a king.

And there's a recurring theme, here: boundedness. These instructions show us that to live well, to love, is to bind ourselves to other people.

But then the list of instructions throws us for a loop. Honor marriage. Unlike the other two, this is a body you can't just bind yourself to. You don't support someone's marriage by becoming a third member of the marriage. Some relationships. Some bodies are. Some blood ... is unique.

In the final instruction it says, do not love money. You can't love what doesn't have a body. And even though God's body isn't right in front of us, it's important for what will come next.

After all, some bodies are unique. So, we can't just step into this people Israel, this time period, this relationship, this blood. That isn't how *\*we\** are to live well or to love well. It isn't as easy as that.

Because things often go wrong when we make sacrifices of our own. And though we want to stay away from the mess, truth be told, our society has no problem with trying (just without the animal in our place).

Honor the stranger? In this suburban neighborhood, we don't have to face people who look and talk differently from us. We can let our kids run around because we won't have to worry about anything or anyone out of the ordinary, nevermind what other neighborhoods are like.

Remember those being imprisoned and tortured as if you were in their place? Better left out of sight, out of mind for our own safety. Just a few miles away, all the men in the state prison system are processed and sent off, and those miles/or even just a few feet might as well be a world apart.

Let marriage be held in honor? In the name of honoring that marriage and the gender roles that goes into it, while dishonoring the love that makes it truly unique, there's the blood of those harmed by sexist discrimination, homophobia, and transphobia.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and content with what you have? We can get cheap goods delivered in a day without worrying about the cost of human lives on the other end or even shipping.

There's violence and conflict, refugee crises and poverty, hunger and thirst. A whole geography of blood.

But Hebrews tells us that when the body is separated from the blood, sacrifice becomes suffering.

So, the writer says, *"Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured. For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."*

We go outside the city gate to where Christ's body was laid in a box-like tomb. But he's not there. This blood and body were re-enclosed by heaven. A heavenly city with a heavenly temple where Christ is the priest and always has been and always will be.

And his sacrifice was once and for all. No other human sacrifice is necessary.

The only sacrifice we or anyone else can offer is “a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.” The writer to the Hebrews continues, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

Suffering on the other hand is not from God and it is not pleasing to God. God feeds us, not just with an apple, but with God’s body and blood, specifically so that we can go to those who suffer. He promises that we will bear fruit.

The fruit of lips that confess his name. This is the apple we find at the scene of the crime, the fruit of temptation and even death. But in Christ and through Christ and only Christ, as people joined to the body of Christ, it becomes life. His death becomes our shared life not because it is good or we are good, but because he is God and God is good. Thanks be to God.