

Cardboard Cutouts or the Real Life?

Hebrews 9:11-15

The Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 18, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Modern people accept as real only those things which they can perceive with their five senses. To talk about something that is beyond the perception of the five senses is beyond modernity's ability to do.

As a modern person I accept the fact that this pulpit is real. My clothing is real. The walls and ceiling and roof of this church are real. I can perceive you sitting in the pews. I therefore accept that you are real. As a modern person I can perceive how certain things in the creation operate. I can perceive the effects of the water cycle and therefore I accept the water cycle as real. I can perceive the results of chemical interactions and therefore I accept chemistry as real. I can perceive the interactions of physically objects and observe their movements, therefore I accept physics and its descriptions of the creation as real.

Modernity will also accept extrapolations of five sense knowledge as real. For example, I have never perceived germs, but I have seen microscopic organism in a microscope. Since five sense knowledge tells us that lenses function in a certain way, modernity accepts the fact that the lenses in the microscope magnify actual organisms that are very small and would be otherwise unnoticeable. Modernity will accept extrapolations regarding those things which five senses knowledge cannot perceive even through a microscope. For example because five senses knowledge can perceive the way that things in the creation interact with each other we can extrapolate that there are these really small units of matter called molecules. By observing how different substances interact with each other, we have extrapolated that there are even smaller units of matter called atoms. By smashing atoms together, we have found that there are even smaller units of matter, protons, neutrons, and electrons. By smashing those particles together in huge particle accelerators we can extrapolate the existence of even smaller particles. We perceive none of these particles. What we are looking at are computer screens that list the charges and data from sensors that are designed to detect such small charges and particles. From that we extrapolate the existence of such particles and therefore modern people believe in their existence and behave as if they exist even though no one has ever seen them.

In order to read the Bible and successfully apply its message we must repent of our modernity. There are some questions which modernity cannot answer. There are some questions that modern people cannot answer. The reason they cannot be answered is because the answers to them lie beyond the scope of five senses knowledge.

Are there angels? Modernity does not know. Since angels are beyond five senses perception modernity cannot answer the question whether or not there are angels. Since angels are beyond perception most modern people reject their existence.

Are there demons? Modernity does not know. Since modernity explains demonic possession in terms of psychological disorders, modernity denies that there are demons.

Is it the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar? Modernity does not know. All modernity can perceive is bread and wine. Even if a modern person took the consecrated elements and put them under a microscope he would not find skin cells and blood cells. He would find only bread and wine because he is looking at them with five senses knowledge.

Does the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth atone for the sin of the whole world? Modernity does not know. It cannot answer. Modernity is not even certain whether or not there is sin. As our modern age

wears on and on fewer and fewer people talk about evil. Whenever someone does talk about evil it is a shock to modernity. They don't expect people like presidents to talk about evil because they cannot perceive whether or not there really is such a thing as evil. While tragedies serve a variety of purposes under the providence of God one of the purposes of tragedies especially the violent ones in our country is to shake us out of the malaise of modernity's uncertainty regarding evil and to place evil in our face so that we acknowledge that it exists.

If modernity cannot accept evil, it does not see a need for atonement of sin, much less can it perceive that the blood of an ancient Jew from Nazareth would be sufficient to atone for the sin of the whole world.

The only way that the blood of Jesus can purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living God is if Jesus is God. Only divine blood will suffice to atone for the sin of all mankind for as long as mankind has been around. If Jesus is not God, then He is just an ancient Jew who got Himself crucified.

Is Jesus God then? Modernity cannot tell. What test would you use to examine the issue? What testimony would you accept? Would you accept the testimony of the apostles who saw Him command the wind and the waves and the wind and the waves obey Him? Or would you dismiss such testimony as the superstitious notions of ancient men who did not know any better.

If Jesus is not God, then there is no way that He can be offering you His body to eat and His blood to drink in the Sacrament of the Altar. If Jesus is not God, then that is only superstitious nonsense without any validity at all.

Can the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer purify the flesh? Here I am talking about sacrifices that God commanded in the Old Testament, in the book of Leviticus. When it talks about the blood of bulls and goats it is talking about all of the sacrifices that God commanded in Leviticus. It is talking about the burnt offering. It is talking about the sin offering. It is talking about the peace offering and the guilt offering. It is talking about the sacrifices that the high priest in the Old Testament performed on the Day of Atonement. When it talks about the ashes of the heifer it is talking about the sacrifice that God commanded in the book of Numbers. God commanded a heifer to be burned together with a scarlet yarn and that the ashes from that burning be mixed into water. Then the water would be kept on hand for the purification of the flesh of those who touched a dead body. If people had touched a dead body, then they were unclean and God forbade them from approaching His presence in the tabernacle. The way to get them clean again was to sprinkle them with the water that had the ashes of the heifer mixed into it. Then they would be clean and God permitted them to approach His presence in the tabernacle.

Now I ask you, can the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer purify the flesh in order to stand in front of the living God? The answer is yes! Yes it can. Even in the New Testament in the Book of Hebrews it affirms that these sacrifices purified the flesh in order to stand in the presence of God. What the book of Hebrews goes on to assert is that if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer could do that, how much more will the blood of Christ purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!

The way the book of Hebrews sets this up is this: if the blood of bulls and goat and the ashes of a heifer could not do the things that God says that they do in the Old Testament in the blood of Jesus cannot do what God says that it can do in the New Testament.

If the flesh of defiled Israelites was not purified by the sacrifices of the Old Testament, then your conscience is not purified to serve the living God by the blood of Jesus in the new.

And yet how often do we read the book of Leviticus and say to ourselves, "This is plain weird"? The reason that we say that is because we do not believe that it is the word of God. We put Leviticus and Numbers and the sacrificial parts of the Old Testament in a separate category in our hearts. We reject them, but we keep the blood of Jesus for the purification of our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. The problem is that God links those two things together. You cannot have the sacrifice of Jesus without at the same time having the sacrifices of the Old Testament because the sacrifices of the Old Testament foreshadow and educate us on the sacrifice of Jesus.

A devout Christian who believes that the blood of Jesus purifies his conscience from dead works to serve the living God, and who believes that he is eating the body and drinking the blood of the Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar reads the book of Leviticus and says to himself, "Yup, all of this makes sense." Blood atones, it purifies. It removes the impurities of my body and disposes of them in the liver. The blood of Jesus removes the impurity of my conscience so that I may live and serve the living God.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.