



Lenten Reflection for Friday, March 25th

Mandy Ripley

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

Hebrews 10:4 - 18

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," he also adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

To me, this passage is about grace. Paul refers to the fact that in the old days, before Christ came, people would make ritual sacrifices to earn forgiveness of their sins. But now, Paul explains, we don't need to do those things, because Christ sacrificed himself on behalf of us all. And yet Paul notes that ironically, there are still priests performing these ritual sacrifices, which are now meaningless and don't bring any pleasure to God.

Reading the passage, I started to wonder: what are our modern-day versions of sacrificing bulls and goats? What are the little ways in which we try to be perfect in the hopes that we will earn God's love? For me, maybe it's counting calories to try to achieve an "ideal" weight, or desperately trying to keep my apartment clean, or obsessively researching the best shoes for my daughter's optimal foot development. Maybe it's posting just the right thing on instagram to show everyone how much I care about the latest tragedy in the news. These are just some of my sad little human-sized attempts at perfection. But this passage reminds me that God doesn't desire these things or take pleasure in them. God's perfection is bigger than us, and it's already been achieved.

So then how do we spend our days, if not preparing offerings and making sacrifices according to the law? How do we live our lives, not seeking forgiveness, but in light of the fact that we are already forgiven? This passage doesn't really get into that. But I think for me, if I focus less on my own desire to be perfect, and more on the fact that I already am perfect to God, then my attention automatically turns outward. It's not all about me anymore, and suddenly I am free to focus my time and energy on helping and encouraging others.



Mandy is a social worker in the field of substance abuse. She lives in Ditmas Park with her husband Matt and their one-year-old daughter Juniper. Back when she had free time, before becoming a mom, Mandy used to enjoy crafting, baking, and reading novels :)