

SUNDAY 20TH MARCH 2022

He chose to invite us into His presence.

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19–25

Matt 27:50–56.



How do you dress yourself – not literally but what ethics and convictions do you embrace that shape your attitude, choices and behaviour?

These indicate to others who you really are – on the inside. It might be a good idea to ask the question – what clothes am I wearing – clothes of compassion, love and acceptance or clothes of pride, jealousy and anger.

Jesus not only offered us His own robe but also invited us into His Father's presence. What once separated us from God's presence has been removed – nothing remains between us and God but an open door.

How did this happen?

For the Jewish people of Jesus' day, God's presence resided solely in the temple – in the Holy of Holies. This was located within the Temple and housed the Ark of the Covenant which represented the glory and presence of Yahweh.

Because God was Holy and His people were not, a thick curtain was in place, to provide a separation barrier between God and man. This curtain was made of finely woven linen, decorated with blue, purple and scarlet thread and embroidered cherubin on. It was hung on gold posts attached to 4 poles made of acacia wood.

It was hung with clasps and measured 5metres X 5metres X 5 metres.

The Holy of Holies was off limits to everyone except to one priest once a year – the high priest – who entered to make atonement for the sins of Israel. The priests had to be from the Tribe of Levi and if you were not – you had zero chance of ever entering the presence of God in the Most Holy Place. If you were a Levite, you still only had a slim chance.

When you enter our Chapel how do you show your reverence of where you are? It is good to chat to others but that can distract you from the real reason I hope you are here for – to stand in awe and reverence to worshipping God.

In Jesus' day the Most Holy Place was a mysterious place that only a handful ever entered. For those chosen to be the high priest, they approached the Ark with tremendous fear. They had an extensive cleansing ritual to first take care of their own sins, before they could atone for the nation. And even then, to enter the presence of God was terrifying – for to be in the presence of God in an unworthy manner could mean death. To enter the Holy of Holies was serious, exhausting and frightening.

Yet, good news we read in Hebrews – we are assured and can have confidence and boldness to enter the presence of God now?

Why is this?

We can consider there would have been nothing less than a seismic shock to be told that the first thing that happened when Jesus died on the cross, was that the curtain of the temple was torn in two – from top to bottom – so not possible for any human to do this.

Jesus made the way open to us through His death on the Cross and His resurrection. You and I can go directly to God, with absolute confidence because of the blood of Jesus.

Imagine you have been offered an opportunity to spend an hour with someone you admire and respect but have never met. Could be a musician, actor, artist, author, leader or expert in any given field. Now imagine when you arrive for your appointment you are told you will be spending the hour but there will be a thick curtain between the two of you the entire time.

How would this fact change the way you had hoped to spend the time? In what way would the curtain impact your visit?

In exchange for our garment of sin, Jesus gave us His robe of seamless perfection, a symbol of the righteousness that gives us access to God's presence.

Jesus became like an usher – you know the people who show you to your seat in a theatre or at an event. Jesus was the final High Priest – there is no need for anyone else. He is our Great Priest and our usher – Jesus not only shows us the way to God but He usher's us into the presence of God.

The Holy Place is now Every place.

The Holy One of God is with us – His time is our time. There is no more separation between there and here, then and now, sacred and secular.

The death of Jesus on the cross opens up a new and living way by which we can live an integrated life.

To integrate something is to create a unified whole from once separated things. It means in part that every place can be a holy

place – no place is off limits and no moment is too small for God's presence.

For the Jews of Jesus' day, it would have been unthinkable that God's presence could reside outside the temple or that everyone other than a priest, would have access to God.

There is no curtain separating us from God anymore but maybe you have put up your own curtain in your heart. A guilty conscience becomes a curtain that separates us from God and as a result we hide from our Master.

Somewhere, sometime, somehow we get tangled up in garbage, thus we avoid God. We allow a veil of guilt to come between us and God, preventing us from entering through the door that Jesus has opened up by His death and resurrection.

Isaiah tells us – we came to the cross dressed in sin but we leave dressed in the “coat of God's strong love, girded with a belt of goodness and fairness and clothed in garments of salvation. We leave dressed in Christ Himself.

Through Christ the curtain was torn in two and we can enter to find unfathomable love, unfathomable forgiveness, compassion and tenderness beyond human understanding.

God wills that we should push on, into His presence and live our whole life there – a life to be enjoyed every moment of every day. The greatest face of the temple was that Jehovah was there – a Presence was waiting within the veil. The presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself, waiting for His redeemed children to push into conscious awareness of His presence.

I'd like to leave us all with a challenge for the coming week.

We have alluded to our clothes or dress in today's sermon. This coming week, as you get dressed, why not allow each piece of clothing to serve as a reminder that you are dressed in the "coat of Jesus' strong love" and therefore have ceaseless access to God's presence.

You may like to put the following on a post-it note and attach to your mirror.

Lord, increase my curiosity and help me to know You so intimately that I am especially, specifically, consciously aware of Your presence throughout the day.