

“God’s Presence” (the Acacia Tree)—Exodus 25:10,21-22

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “God’s Presence” (the Acacia Tree), is Exodus 25:10,21-22 → Yahweh told Moses: *They shall make an ark of acacia wood . . . And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

Consider all the works Thy hand hath made . . .

. . . When through the woods and forest glades I wander,

I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees . . .” (LSB 801:1-2)

These familiar lyrics contained in the hymn “How Great Thou Art” express the awe of God’s power and majesty reflected in nature. It may even bring forth a feeling of being in the presence of God, so much so that throughout history sinners have *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and*

*creeping things* (cf. Romans 1:23). While striving to bask in God's presence by basking in His creation, many have foolishly *exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator* (cf. Romans 1:25 NIV). Such statements as "I feel the closest to God in nature" could express such idolatry.

While Yahweh's presence is reflected in nature it actually has much more substance than just the beauty of nature, the wonder of creation and the awesomeness of His creatures. It has to do with His desire to deliver His creation and creatures from their *bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God* in His presence eternally (cf. Romans 8:21). He provided for His presence in the midst of the deliverance of His people from bondage to Egypt with the building of the tabernacle. The wood of the acacia tree played an important part in that tabernacle of God's presence.

Acacia trees can grow to a height of about twenty feet, with a trunk up to two feet thick, found in abundance in the Sinai desert where the Israelites wandered after the Exodus. The branches of the tree are covered with thorns. Acacia is a hard, dense, durable wood that is resistant to insects and other decay, making it exceptionally suitable for cabinet-making. It's use in the Scriptures is spoken of exclusively with the making of objects of worship housed in the tabernacle. Our text refers to it's use to build *the ark of the testimony*, a box or chest to hold

“the Ten Commandments” (referred to in our text as *the testimony*).

The words of our text were spoken by Yahweh to Moses while he was on Mount Sinai (sometimes also referred to as Mount Horeb). Receiving “the Ten Commandments” along with other instructions concerning their relationship with the LORD, Moses was given very specific instructions for building a dwelling where Yahweh would manifest His presence amongst His people. In verse 22 of our text the LORD said He would *meet with Moses, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony*, He would *speak with him about all that He would give him in commandment for the people of Israel*.

True to Yahweh’s practice of using His created things within which to manifest His presence, this *ark of the testimony*, made from the acacia tree, was a manifestation of God’s presence. Its portability provided that it be carried before God’s people when they moved around in the wilderness (cf. Numbers 10:33). It also went before them with the taking of the Promised Land (cf. Joshua 3), especially with taking the city of Jericho (cf. Joshua 6). Respect of the LORD’s presence manifested in *the ark of the testimony* was demanded of sinners so much so that only the Levites were to care for it. It brought the immediate punishment of God upon those who disrespected God’s holy presence connected to it by touching it or even looking *upon the ark of the LORD* (cf. 1 Samuel 4:17-7:2; 2 Samuel

6:6-7).

This is why the *mercy seat on the top of the ark* was so important. This *mercy seat* was not like a chair as we may think of a “seat.” Rather, it was a cover placed over the ark with two angels (i.e. *cherubim*) with their wings stretched out over it. God’s acting in the lives of people happens on the basis of His mercy because of their sin in the presence of His holiness. Nehemiah 9:17 describes Yahweh as *a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*. When you experience the presence of the LORD your conscientiousness of your sin is so great that it drives you to your knees to cry out, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner!*” (cf. Luke 18:13)

And He does . . . on His terms, in His way, for His purpose! *The ark of the testimony* was placed in the tabernacle *behind the second curtain* in a . . . section called *the Most Holy Place* (cf. Hebrews 9:3). Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and sprinkle the blood *over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat* for the forgiveness of sins for the whole nation (cf. Leviticus 16). Only by this sacrifice could the people experience God’s mercy and forgiveness to rejoice and live in His presence with the desire to obey His commandments.

It was all a picture proclaiming what Yahweh would do one day when He would “tabernacle” with His people in the Person of Jesus (cf. John

1:14) and offer Himself as *the Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world* in the Work of Jesus (cf. John 1:29). The book of Hebrews connects this typology to the Person and Work of Jesus as our great High Priest Who *entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption* for all people (cf. Hebrews 9:12).

The LORD is merciful and His mercy can only be received through faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. In Jesus you experience God's presence which should cause you to drop to your knees in humble repentance and thank Jesus for offering Himself as the perfect sacrifice for your sins, confessing those sins to Him. Thank Him for establishing a relationship with you as your loving Father and not simply as your Creator Who can display His judgment upon sin through the same creation in which you find His beauty.

Being cleansed of sin releases you from the burden of sin's consequences—eternal separation from God's presence in hell. However, it also empowers your walk in relationship with God today. Hebrews 9:14 says that *the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, will purify our conscience **from dead works to serve the living God***. In verse 22 of our text the LORD said He would *meet with Moses, and . . . speak with him about all that He would give him **in commandment for the people of Israel***.

God's purpose for "gracing" His people is to provide a merciful and loving motivation for showing our love for Him by obeying His commandments. Being delivered *from dead works to serve the living God* is a witness of His people to the nations around us that we serve Yahweh, Who is a living, speaking presence amongst His people **by His choice** rather than a lifeless, speechless idol conjured up in the minds of people based upon some observation of creation. We serve the God Who came amongst us sinners, took upon Himself our sin in order to deliver us from its enslaving power, thereby not leaving us to ourselves to figure out how to appease our guilty consciences in a frantic search for peace. God's presence in Jesus and the Holy Spirit is our power for living according to His commandments.

There are some theologians who think that possibly the crown of thorns which Jesus wore was woven out of acacia branches. It is an interesting picture in an effort to connect Jesus' offering Himself as the sacrifice Whose blood atones for all sin with the blood sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark made out of acacia wood did for the sins of the nation. Who knows? What we do know is this: God's presence which we experience right now here in this place empowers us to live as children of His presence in the world of our daily lives so that we can hold out Person & Work of Jesus to others for the forgiveness of their sins, new life and salvation. Amen.

But when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in—  
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing  
He bled and died to take away my sin;  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art! How great Thou art! (LSB 801:3)