

The Ultimate Scapegoat
Mark 15 & 16
Colebrook Congregational Church
April 5, 2015

Yom Kippur, or the Day of Atonement, is the Holiest of the Jewish High Holy festivals, considered to be the Sabbath of Sabbaths, and is centered around atonement and forgiveness.

On that day, before the door of the Temple in Jerusalem, two goats were chosen by lot. One was designated to be the Lord's Goat, the goat for YHWH; and the other to be the scapegoat, the goat for Azazel. The Lord's Goat was sacrificed by the High Priest as a sin offering on behalf of all the people of Israel. The blood was taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant, so this dealt with their "pollution" of sin. Then, the High Priest laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed all the inequities, transgressions, and sins of the people of Israel. Then the scapegoat was led away, carrying all the inequities, transgressions, and sins of the people of Israel into the wilderness...and was in practice led off a cliff outside the city limits, so that the goat could not return to the community. The sins of the people were thus atoned for by both the goats, one through sacrifice, and the other through banishment.

For us, who believe and have faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, this is how He has saved us. If atonement by sacrificing a goat has to be spiritually renewed annually, imagine how much powerful the sacrifice of a human who was also divine would be. It need not be repeated or renewed, but keeps its power through time. Jesus is the ultimate scapegoat, carrying away our sins, atoning to God for them on our behalf, and showing divine love for us.

Since there is no Temple, the ceremony with the two goats is no longer performed. We do not sacrifice the same way today. But for some of us, we made a different kind of sacrifice during Lent, and as we celebrate the Resurrection of our Ultimate Scapegoat, we should reflect upon those sacrifices. We should ask ourself three questions: Did my sacrifice change me? Am I the same person as I was before? & Was my sacrifice worth it?

Prayers of the People

[PAUSE]

Creator of all things, you made the world in beauty, and restore all things in glory through the victory of Jesus Christ. We give you thanks for your guidance and the joys of our lives. We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed, the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love, and peace, to the glory of your name. We pray for all in our world who need you: the lonely, the sick, the stricken, and the grieved. We offer ourselves to be your messengers and agents that responds to the needs of our neighbors, no matter how far away they are. Guide us, equip us, and bolster us to serve you well as we serve others. We pray for our caregivers and defenders, in all the ways they manifest. We especially pray for:

Our Kenyan brothers and sisters in Christ being persecuted against for following you.

Through the resurrection of your Son, O God, you destroy the power of death and remove your people's shame. And by the power of the Spirit, raise us from sin and seat us at the paschal feast, that we may rejoice in the gift of salvation Jesus has won for us. Amen.