

**ONCE FOR ALL**  
**Third in a Series: "From Old to New"**  
**Communion Meditation –Third Sunday Lent –March 3, 2013**  
**The Church of the Covenant**

I sort of love the character played by actress Maggie Smith on the PBS series, "Downton Abbey". She is so prim and proper and has such biting commentary on just about everything. She is referred to as the "dowager countess". She has an opinion about everything and everyone and doesn't mind expressing it. Sometimes people view the church of Jesus Christ as being a lot like Maggie Smith on Downton Abbey, opinionated, judgmental and with a cold, cold heart. My Great Aunt Emily was a lot like Maggie Smith on Downton Abbey. She wore those old big, black horn-rimmed glasses with the points at the end. She wore her hair in the same hairstyle as in 1942; she always wore black and either black or green jewelry. When we would go out to dinner with my family and my Great Aunt and my Grandmother would get together, just watch out. They were a little hard of hearing so everything they said was LOUD. They would do color commentary on everyone in the restaurant –what they were wearing (always inappropriate), how they were talking with their mouths open and the elbows on the table, and how their table manners were "atrocious; just atrocious!". Atrocious was my Great Aunt's favorite word and she would raise the decibel levels on saying it when she was honing in on some victim in the restaurant. Another favorite: "She's dressed to burn the garbage." I don't know how people dress to burn the garbage but seemingly everyone in the late 1960's was dressed to do just that. And when hemlines on women's skirts went up and up and up, boy howdy, were we in for it. I remember Aunt Emily practically shouting out, "My Lord, that's barely enough to cover the subject!" My Dad and I would feel like dying or at least slinking under the table until dinner was over. But never try to hush her. "Don't try to shush me; that person NEEDS to hear what I am saying!!!" And then she would raise the decibel level even more. You get the picture. I love my Aunt Emily and in a sense its good to have someone like Aunt Emily around to keep you on track, but no one wants to BE Aunt Emily, its pretty lonely, because you don't like to hang around people like that.

Unfortunately, the church comes off a lot like Maggie Smith and my Great Aunt combined and on steroids. You know, let's sit around and judge everyone; let's pretend we're filled with the love of Jesus but then act like we really don't want other people around; that's good; that's bad; you're dressed appropriately; you're not; you're a sinner; you're not. Its just pointing fingers at a lot of other people to try to hide the fact of my own sin. I'm going to call that "old church". Old Church is very legalistic, its all about judging people; its about we GOOD people and you BAD people and most of its sermons are moralistic, tut-tut-tutting about how bad everything and everyone is. It doesn't lift you up; its there to make you feel bad.

Our scripture from Hebrews is defining a movement from Old to New, from Old Covenant to New Covenant, from Old Testament to New Testament, from an old way of being the people of God to a new way of being the people of God. When Jesus comes HE breathes new life into everything; nothing is the same anymore; Old Church is gone; New Church comes. The old religious entity of Jesus' time had become grievously disconnected from its Biblical moorings. King Herod ostensibly the King of Judea wasn't even Jewish; he was Idumean and so illegitimate. He did not stand in the lineage of King David. The Temple, referred to as Herod's Temple, that he built in Jerusalem felt more Roman than Jewish, and by the way was not built to the specifications clearly outlined in the Old Testament. It was called the Temple but it really wasn't. The high priests were supposed to be "in the order of Melchizedek" meaning they were to be blood relations of the priests who had long ministered in the Temple, but they were not. The high priests who were so influential in having Jesus put to death, Caiaphas and Annas,

were not rightly in office; they were illegitimate. They were all going through the motions, as Pastor Emily said last week, they were going through empty and meaningless ritual, because it was about ritual not relationship. The Temple might have been beautiful; it might have been filled with people; filled with ritual –Oh, but it was EMPTY of the one true and living, God.

So then Jesus comes. The Son of God arrives to set things right in His Father’s house. Palm Sunday He claims the Temple for His Father. Jesus is in the house and lineage of David, so He is the fulfillment of the Covenant God made with David. So He is King of Kings and Lord of Lord’s. Jesus is the True Temple of the Living God; it is His life that will be torn down and in three days it will be raised up. The Temple of Herod will be torn down by the Romans in 70 A.D. and it is still not built up again. And O, Jesus is the high priest; HE is in the order of Melchizedek. As our scripture says, We have *“such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.”* (Hebrews 7: 26) He, Jesus, is the sinless LAMB of GOD who would be slain. He is the one perfect sacrifice to atone for sin, to reconcile us to God, to have the divide between God and humanity come tumbling down. HE is King of Kings; HE is Temple; HE is High Priest and HE is sacrifice. And when HE willingly went to the cross for us, for the JOY that was set before Him, when HE shed His blood at Calvary for us, when by His stripes we are healed and forgiven, then the death HE died to sin once and for all was done for us and our salvation. On the Day of Atonement, each year, the High Priest would enter into the Holy of Holies, the place where it was believed God quite literally dwelt, and He would bring a sacrifice for Himself and for the people. But at Calvary and on Good Friday, Jesus entered into a temple not made with hands, and He offered up Himself as the one, complete, sufficient sacrifice, wholly acceptable unto God. By His shed blood He washed all sin away; all our sin; all the sin of the world. Through that one act, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the High Priest and the sacrifice, all in one, as it says, *“he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”* (Hebrews 7: 27) And what all the blood of all the animals sacrificed over all the years could NEVER do, He did, through the POWER in the Blood of the Lamb of God. HE did this ONCE for ALL –He did this one time for all of us –once for all of our sin. The Blood of Lamb has wiped the slate clean; our sin is no more; our stain is no more; not a speck remains; our guilt is no more. We have been FORGIVEN and FREED by Jesus’ entering into the Holy of Holies as our High Priest, offering up Himself as a living Sacrifice, and granting us forgiveness –ONCE FOR ALL.

You don’t have to come to church every Sunday filled with remorse and guilt for the week (Jesus has wiped that away by His blood); you don’t have to come to the altar time and time again (Jesus did it once and that’s enough); you don’t have to be in fear that maybe someday you might lose your salvation (Jesus has taken all our sin away, once for all). What if we chose really to live out of our forgiveness? What if we could then be totally generous with people who aren’t perfect (because God has been generous with us who are not perfect)? What if we didn’t have to be Maggie Smith or my Great Aunt Emily and let the Lord Jesus sort out who He washes clean in His blood? Would we be free from the guilt and the failings of the past? Could we be released from the bondage not only of sin but of the guilt for our sin? Could we move from OLD Church to NEW Church? Could we finally and fully accept that the power in the blood of Jesus is so strong that no failing, no sin, no doubt, no nothing could ever separate us from the love of God poured out at the cross? Could we BE FORGIVENESS and LOVE that we have received for our world? Could we move from OLD to NEW ----ONCE FOR ALL??????????

Invite the High Priest, the One in the order of Melchizedek, the One who is King and Lord and Priest and Temple and Sacrifice, to enter into the Holy of Holies of your heart, and wash it all away --forgiven, loved and freed. ONCE FOR ALL! COTC don’t be the dowager countess sitting on our throne on East Beau Street. BE the forgiveness of Jesus for our world.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA  
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*