

What A Priest We Have in Jesus!

5th Sun. in Lent – 03/17/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hebrews 5:1-10 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 9-10 [Says of Jesus,] **“And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”**

Introduction

✘ Let's be honest, we all have our favorite ways of referring to Jesus. And the Bible provides us with quite the variety of options as Jesus, the Son of Man is referred to using an assortment of titles: Scripture calls Jesus our “Savior” and “Redeemer.” He is our “Lord” and “God”; our “Brother” and “Friend”; our “Great Physician” and “Good Shepherd.”

➔ Which of these is most comfortable; most comforting for you? Each title highlights a different dimension of our Savior's power, work, service and sacrifice for sinners.

✘ But it's far less often that we describe Jesus as our “Priest,” and frankly, I think that's unfortunate. In today's Epistle Reading, the preacher to the Hebrews works to try and correct this oversight as he calls out and highlights the priestly service of our Savior. He focuses our attention on how Jesus is our perfect High Priest. In fact, he milks this priestly title for all it's worth, and in the process, brings to us all the comfort and confidence that Jesus offers us as our Priest.

➔ So let's together bask in this great truth. Let's ponder the priesthood of Jesus as we draw ever-closer to His self-sacrifice on Good Friday.

I. Jesus – appointed to serve us.

✘ Fortunately the preacher to the Hebrews provides for us some history about the high priesthood to get us going. The service of the priestly office was a foundational part of the Lord's design for what it meant to be a believer of Yahweh in the times of the Old Testament. Very soon after He rescued the Israelites from Pharaoh's slavery, before they fully got going on their journey to The Promised Land, God specifically selected Aaron and his sons to provide this priestly service for His people. They were called the Levites, named after Levi who was one of Jacob's sons and father of one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

➔ They were to serve all of their fellow Israelites on behalf of God; offering regular gifts and sacrifices to God – both for the sins of the people and for their own sin. God Himself defined and appointed these men to this priestly service.

✘ Now, because the priesthood was reserved for those who were chosen by God, the book of Hebrews tells us in verse five that Jesus, too, was appointed to this priestly service. His priestly appointment – you could say His ordination, was made public in a big way at His Baptism. It's there that Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and set apart to serve as our great High Priest. Remember the Father's declaration for all to hear from heaven in Matthew 3:17 that day? “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

II. Jesus sympathizes with us.

✘ Yes, God the Father appointed God the Son, Jesus as our great High Priest so that He can serve us and help us. No one else in all of history could serve this crucial role as the mediator between us and God. Jesus alone is qualified to do this because He is one of us – bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; a human man among all of mankind. As one of us, Jesus knows...He knows all of our weaknesses and frailties. In the passage just before today's text, Hebrews 4:15 pinpoints the comfort you and I have in Jesus as our High Priest when it says,

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.”

→ This was foundational to Jesus serving as God’s High Priest to us – He willingly took upon Himself our human weaknesses to suffer temptation, hunger, fatigue, sadness, loneliness, rejection, persecution and more.

→ And because Jesus knows our every weakness, He then deals gently with those under His care who are uninformed and wayward. That’s us, by the way – ignorant and rebellious. Yes, we are different from Jesus because we are not without sin. We get all tangled up in temptation so that sin just clings to our very being – every step we take in this life. It’s our instinctive habit to stray from our Lord’s plans and purposes. We deviate from His desires; always seeking, it seems, to think about and serve ourselves instead of those around us.

✘ In today’s Gospel Reading, we see this contrast clearly between our sin and the amazing gentleness of Jesus. Try to imagine walking with Jesus among His disciples to Jerusalem. Jesus had just predicted His death and resurrection. This makes at least three times that Jesus told the disciples He would suffer and die. But instead of praying and preparing for their Lord’s saving work as He just laid it out before them, James and John looked inward and hatched their own plan.

→ They were looking at how this might help them get ahead. So they came to Jesus asking to sit in glory, longing to get a leg up on everyone else, and climbing all over their fellow disciples in a mad dash to the top of the heap no matter who they had to step on in the process. When the other ten heard about this attempted power play, they were indignant – angry – ready to retaliate against the brazen audacity of these two guys. After three years of teaching and ministry, it’s amazing now, as Jesus makes His way to Calvary that a self-centered, civil war was about to erupt among His disciples. For anyone else, that would have been more than enough reason to ignite a leader’s anger and wrath.

→ But with Jesus, no wrath was kindled. Instead, as a priest, Jesus dealt gently with His wayward disciples. He neither condemned nor approved of their sin. Instead of excusing their conduct as something they could not help, He focused on setting them straight with His measured, priestly sympathy. He corrected them directly, lovingly and patiently: “It shall not be so among you,” He said (Mk. 10:43). He reminded them of His important priestly purpose: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mk. 10:45).

✘ And what do you know, you and I are not much different than those disciples walking with Jesus that day, are we? And we should have the advantage over them in that we now know how Jesus selflessly offered the sacrifice of Himself on that cross for us all.

→ But still, what do we do? We let the power struggle of group politics get the best of us just as it did the disciples. Jesus tells us that we are to live in Him and His Word above all else...above all else, but like a bunch teenage boys in the school yard, trying to impress the girls, we push and we shove, we argue and we shout and we fight for dominance – sticking our heels in and defending our chosen political party or arguing to advance some passionate agenda just because we think it gives us some advantage or makes it so that we can say, “See, I was right.” And all of this, even when whatever it is we’re fighting for is clearly against God’s Word of truth in Scripture. Folks, I know this is going to ruffle some feathers, but Jesus does not endorse the Republican or the Democratic or the Independent parties of the United States of America. He endorses and proclaims and calls all of us, as Christians first to share His Word of truth alone for the saving of souls and to serve all people as He has first served us.

→ And when we fight, for example, about whether or not we should defend and protect the life of baby from the point of conception, or a school child from an active shooter, or a person from sexual or physical or verbal abuse, or a disabled person who is just as much a beautiful creation of God as anyone else, or an elderly or diseased person who is weak and near the end of life...when we fight each other about which one of these lives is “more important” than the others, when He is clear in Scripture that every one of them is equally precious; when we do this just to win our own political argument instead of loving and defending these and all people, then Jesus says to us too, “It shall not be so among you” (Mk. 10:43). “For even the Son of Man came...to give His life as a ransom for [all]” (Mk. 10:45).

✘ Yes, He came and He gave His life to ransom even you and you and you...! This is Jesus as our great High Priest. This is our comfort now today! Jesus deals gently with us. He knows our sins. He knows our ignorance. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our struggles and our sufferings. And Jesus knows these things not merely as facts, knowledge, or data about us.

→ Remember, He knows it all, because He Himself endured temptation and trouble in every respect just as we have, but without falling into sin. So He feels for us and He suffers with us because He is a human being – like us, yet only Jesus, as our great High Priest can do something about it. He already did it – offering His life as a ransom for us all. What a priest we have in Jesus!

III. Jesus learned obedience through suffering.

✘ You know, one of the biggest surprises in this text about Jesus’ priestly service is that it was a learning process for Him. We could actually say that Jesus learned to be a priest the hard way – through the school of suffering. Verse eight says, “Although [Jesus] was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered.” As our priest, Jesus grew up learning what it meant to be a human being with flesh and blood and bone, just like us. He was a student in the school of suffering – a divine disciple who learned obedience alongside His earthly brothers and sisters. Although He was God and could always know everything, Jesus never used His omniscience when it would just serve Himself. He didn’t cut corners. He didn’t cheat. He didn’t jump to the front of the line. Luke 2:52 tells us that the 12-year-old Jesus “increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” So in this priestly role, Jesus reverently and prayerfully learned obedience through what He suffered.

→ We all can relate with that, right? When was the last time you tried to learn something new and difficult? Maybe you downloaded an app to help you learn a new language or you watched YouTube videos to learn how to perform a home improvement project or maybe you downloaded a recipe, hoping to sauté your way to success in the kitchen or maybe you took lessons from your grandchild on how to work your “smart” phone. Whatever it was, how did it go? Were you perfect on the first try? Or did it take some trial and error? Or maybe you learned that some things are best left to the experts.

✘ As a “student” Jesus was certainly above average, yet we know that He “learned” to be our priest in the most difficult way possible – through His extreme suffering. Tears would be his teacher. Pain and bloody sweat would be His instructor. Neither nails nor thorns nor the scourges stripes would stop Him from learning to be our perfect priest. Where all others would falter and fail, Jesus pressed on and excelled.

→ Verse seven of our text alludes to Jesus’ prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane as our perfect priest. It’s there that He “offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence.” And those perfect, priestly prayers continued as Jesus suffered in our place on the cross: “Father, forgive them.” “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit!” (cf. Lk. 23:34, 46; Mt. 27:46).

→ These perfect prayers express our Lord's perfect obedience to His Father. And as verse nine says, Jesus endured the school of suffering in order to become "the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." Only this reverent and obedient Priest, Jesus, has secured your salvation and mine. What He suffered was suffered because of our sin. The pain He endured was the penalty meant for us. The death He died was the required ransom to redeem a world filled with sinful, wayward rebels. Because of Jesus' reverence; because of His perfect, prayerful obedience, His Father raised Him from the dead and then seated Him, at His ascension, at His right hand in glory. It's there that Jesus continues to intercede for you and me as our great High Priest. Salvation is found in no one else!

IV. Jesus equips us for priestly service.

✘ The Bible reveals one final surprise regarding the priestly work of Jesus. To our amazement He actually invites you and me now to share in His priestly work. As Christians, in this earthly life, we have also been made priests – priests, serving under the perfect Priest. As Romans 12:1 says, we are called to present our bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

→ In baptism, God made us His holy people. And as such we are called now to offer prayers back to the Father on behalf of all those around us – as a priestly offering that is pleasing to God.

→ And as priests of the perfect Priest, we live here on earth as daily students in the school of suffering – following in the footsteps of our great High Priest.

✘ But remember, if we turn this gift of service into something that serves us instead, or when we fail to pray for others, we sin. Yet this truth never fails or falls short – Jesus' perfect, priestly service in our place; His obedience on our behalf; His selfless sacrifice on the cross covers our sin and guilt and washes us clean in heart, mind and soul forever. He promises to perfect our lives through His perfect forgiveness and love, for He is, indeed, "the source of (our) eternal salvation" (v.10). What a priest we have in Jesus! Amen.