

**Season after Pentecost**  
**Hebrews: Week 3**  
August 22 & 23, 2015  
Haven Lutheran Church  
Readings: Hebrews 4:14 - 5:10

*Grace to you and peace from God — Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen*

The preacher wound up the service by announcing, "Next Week I'm going to preach on the subject of lying. To get yourselves prepared for my sermon, I ask that you read the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Mark."

On the following Sunday, the preacher rose to begin, and said, "Now, then, all of you who have done as I requested and read the seventeenth chapter of Mark, please raise your hands." Nearly every hand in the congregation went up.

Then the preacher said, "You're just the people I want to talk to. There is no seventeenth chapter of Mark."<sup>1</sup>

The Preacher who composed the sermon we call Hebrews does not use such trickery of shaming to reach his listeners. I don't think it's a good approach for any preacher but it certainly won't work when your mission is to help some worn and weary Christians to renew their love and commitment to Jesus. We moderns may wonder how talking about Jesus as a high priest would inspire any excitement or "Amen!" But that is exactly what the Hebrews' Preacher hopes to do. He is trying to help them and us rediscover our love for Jesus --- our brother, our compassionate companion and savior -- and to deepen our understanding of the love and power of God revealed in Jesus.

Last week, I asked you to write down a list of those things you love about God. Though I should not assume, I think I can be fairly sure that "high priest" is not likely on your list. Perhaps it would be if we were more recently Jewish, as it seems the writer and original listeners of Hebrews were. When the Israelites moved out of Egyptian slavery into the unknowns of freedom, the Lord provided foundations for living faithfully and peacefully as God's people. Among those foundations were the commandments, guidelines for everyday living and worship. Descendants of Moses' brother Aaron would be the priest who lead certain religious practices. What does that position have to do with Jesus, we say. But to those early Jewish-Christians, to think of Jesus in that light was a new and great insight. See if you can see why as the Hebrew's preacher outlines the role and qualification of the high priest.

- ◆ The high priest was an ordinary human.

- ◆ The high priest was not elected or self proclaimed but anointed, specially set apart by God.
- ◆ The high priests “had a holy job, but .... Because [they] were also ordinary human beings, their own weaknesses and failings enabled them to be sympathetic and treat confused and sinful people with gentleness and understanding.”<sup>2</sup>
- ◆ The high priest was a mediator between humanity and God. He offered the penitent’s gifts and sacrifices to God on their behalf and gave the assurance of God’s forgiveness on God’s behalf.

Can you begin to see how Jesus fits this role of high priest and to an even greater, unique degree? Fully human, divinely appointed, not just for a lifetime but forever. Able to fully sympathize with the human frailties and temptations because he too was human., though he never forsake his love and obedience to God. One who stands before God on our behalf and offers to us God’s own forgiveness and love. After laying out Jesus as the greatest of high priests, the Preacher of Hebrews ties it together with Jesus as our savior. “Pressed into the muck and mire of human anguish [and suffering], Jesus never forgot he was God’s son. Therefore, not only is he compassionate toward those who have lost sight of the truth that they are God’s very own children, Jesus can also take us by the hand and led us home.”<sup>3</sup> Through his life, suffering, death, and resurrection Jesus — the high priest AND the offering --- forever stands in solidarity with us here in good and bad AND holds us in grace and love before the throne of the Almighty, forever bridging the gap between earth and heaven, humanity and God, now and forever.

“It’s [still] probably a stretch for us to really get what the writer of Hebrews is trying to describe in saying that Jesus is our high priest” or that obscure priest, Melchizedek. It’s probably a stretch for us to really understand the Jesus of theologians: fully God, fully human. It’s as much a stretch for us as it was for the hearers of Hebrews to really understand what it is that God wants for and from us. Later in the sermon, we learn the people of Hebrews were still not sure if the Lord they worshiped was truly approachable or to be terrified.“ God, what do you want? A cereal offering, a bull, a ram? Do you want a tithe, a testimony, a guilty conscience? Do you want me to serve on four committees and run the night shelter? Do you want prayer without ceasing or a thousand signed petitions for peace and justice?”

“No, God wants only one thing, said the preacher of Hebrews. Not an unblemished goat or a fat pledge card, not a gift to the building fund or a promise to walk across burning coals. God desires this: a fully human life,” human life as God created it, a life lived in

harmony with God and all creation.... a life lived in love with God and loving what God loves. "But, of course, [that] life truly well lived is the one thing we cannot, on our own, bring to God." Jesus went where we could not go to do and accomplish what we could not do. "He walked the same paths as we, experienced the same temptations as we, endured the same afflictions common to our humanity, but who never lost his bearings, never compromised his humanity. The human being each of us fails to be, he was, and he is "not ashamed" to call us his brothers and sisters (Heb. 2:11 ) It was he who walked, as the high priest, into the great sanctuary and, on behalf of us all, placed himself into the offering plate, the one thing God truly desires: a human being fully alive."<sup>4</sup>

It was not pain and violence that God desired. It is not pain and suffering God wants from us now. It is human life as God created it to be, summoned it to be. But we descendants of Adam and Ever are lost children who have wandered away from home, forgotten what a truly human life [lived with God] might be. When Jesus, our older, resurrected brother, presented himself in the sanctuary of God, his humanity fully intact, he did not cower as though he were in a place of "blazing fire and darkness and gloom." Instead Jesus, our high priest, our brother, our Savior called out, "I'm home, and I have the children with me" (Heb. 2:13). Listen well. We are those children. There are no debts to be paid, only love to be claimed and proclaimed in lives well lived through the grace and strength of our Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen. Linda M Alessandri 8/21/15

#### ENDNOTES

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1.source: <http://www.jokebuddha.com/Preacher#ixzz3jUXTEIZo>

2. Thomas G. Long, Interpretation: Hebrews Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997 p. 67

3. Thomas G. Long, Interpretation: Hebrews Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997 p. 68

4.Thomas G. Long, "What God Wants" as posted on [www.religion-online.org](http://www.religion-online.org) (March 21, 2006)