

Job 38: 1-7 (34-41)

Psalm 104: 1-9, 25, 37b

Hebrews 5: 1-10

St. Mark 10: 35-45

Pentecost 22 2024.

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“Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Hebrews 5: 1

Some people can get impatient with theory which doesn't at first seem to have much connection with daily life... We sometimes speak about teachers in “ivory towers,” which means people who are remote, and who are not engaged with the troubles of ordinary life... Perhaps it's a Maritimes expression, but my late mother sometimes spoke of people who were “so heavenly minded, they are no earthly good...” For her, it was important that theology had an application to daily life...

It's true that sometimes theologians have gotten so caught up with trying to understand or capture the ways of God, that there is a certain disconnect from daily life... One example is from the late Middle Ages, when a theologian wrote about, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin”... I don't mean to be unkind anyone when I say this, but... honestly, What practical difference does this make?... None...

Yes – sometimes theology about God can get theoretical and divorced from daily life... However, *good* theology is *very* relevant to daily life... When Christians try to understand the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, this isn't meant to be a theoretical conversation... “Christ's forgiveness” is very much rooted in our daily experience of brokenness and sin, and our deep universal human need for relief and freedom... Or, when teachers speak about the presence of Christ when we share Communion together in the Eucharistic service, this isn't meant to be an abstract debate. Christ's presence is rooted in our very real need for strengthening, and belonging, and unity...

Good theology, then, tells us something about our spiritual existence, but also how to live well in *this* world as well as the future... Today's second reading is from Hebrews 5. We're reading about sacrifices and Jewish priests in the beginning of the reading... We might be tempted to think, What does this have to do with life in North Bay, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?... But this theology is extremely relevant to our lives. Let's just take a few moments, to understand what we are reading...

What is a priest, anyway?... Let's admit that, left to ourselves, there is a division between God and humanity. God is perfect. We are im-perfect... More often than we would care to admit, we often say the wrong thing; or we don't bother when we should have made a bit of effort; or we did something we regret!... It might be a big sin. More likely, it's a petty little sin – but it's still a sin... It's less than the best. Even a little wrong is still a wrong is still wrong. Compared to the standard of our perfectly good God, sooner or later, we all have a problem...

What to do, about this gap between our perfect God, and im-perfect humanity?... We can't fix it ourselves, so God took the initiative to do something about it. "When the time had fully come," God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ... Injustices has to have consequences. Jesus Christ took on the sins of the world, in order to restore us to God... If we imagine a gap between people and God, Jesus Christ bridged the gap, so that we can enjoy fellowship with God!...

What practical difference does this make? It means that we can be relieved of guilt and shame. It means that we have peace. It means that we can belong. No matter how independent we might think we can be, all of us need to receive love and care and forgiveness. In the words of the old John Wimber song,

O let the Son of God enfold you, with his presence and his love;  
Let him fill your heart and satisfy your soul...

One of the meanings of a "priest" is one who bridges the gap – bridges the gap between a sinless God and a sinful humanity... The writer of Hebrews explains brilliantly that one of the ways to describe what Jesus has done for us is to call him our perfect High Priest... Jesus Christ bridged the natural gap, between ourselves and God... By Jesus' self-sacrifice, our fellowship with God is restored for ever... We receive this gift by faith – by taking what Jesus Christ has done, and daring to live and believe in response to him...

So, Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. By his self-offering, his sacrifice, the gap has been closed, and we can be re-united with the Living God...

Yet, here's an interesting point: As Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, First Peter reads that Christians – followers of Jesus – are *all* in some sense "priests..." We read, "Come to [Christ]... let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (2: 5)..."

Wow! Because Jesus Christ is our great High Priest, who offered the perfect offering of himself, we are a great nation or community or family – the whole Church of God... You and I all together are described in the New Testament as being a "Holy Priesthood..."

Christians believe that we don't have to go to a *place* to be close to God – like Jerusalem, or Mecca, or the River Ganges, or wherever... We don't have to have to follow some rituals to get close to God. God is already here! We have access to God... We can pray to God, any time we like.

Jesus Christ is our great High Priest. You and I, following Jesus, are a nation of priests... We can have access to God, any time...

Jesus Christ has already paid the full price. We respond, with our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving... The Apostle Paul puts it this way:

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect... (Romans 12: 1-2)

Our lives are offerings to God, in response to God's mercy and love shown in Jesus...

Okay, so Jesus is our great High Priest. Together, we are a community of priests following Jesus. Men and women, lay and ordained, we all have access to God, and we're learning to live in response to the Lord's perfect self-offering...

In the ancient world, the Jewish priests would offer sacrifices of animals over and over and over again... We don't need to do that any more. Jesus' offering is perfect; complete... Hebrews 10: 10 reads, "And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all..." God has done it all. He has looked after us...

When we pray together Sunday by Sunday, we recall this finished work of God... The words of the older Anglican Prayer Book are very clear that the sacrifice of Jesus is perfect and complete. Many of us know these words very well:

BLESSING and glory and thanksgiving be unto thee Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to take our nature upon him, and **to suffer death upon the Cross for our redemption; who made there, by his one oblation [= "having been offered"] of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.**

Following Anglican tradition, the Kenyan Anglican service that we use monthly at St. Brice's is also very clear that the sacrifice of Jesus is perfect and complete; we don't need to add to it:

Therefore, heavenly Father, hear us as we celebrate this covenant with joy, and await the coming of our brother, Jesus Christ. **He died in our place, making a full atonement for the sins of the whole world, the perfect sacrifice, once and for all.**

Now, most Anglican clergy can be called “priests.” That is a topic for a sermon on leadership. Above all, we cherish that all of us – lay and ordained – are under the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus...

We don't have to earn God's love. We don't need to earn God's forgiveness... The sacrifice of Jesus our great High Priest is perfect and complete. We learn to live in response to his gift – that is *our* offering to God...

So, if we try to live lives our own way, without God's help along the way (good luck with that!), there remains this huge gap between our daily lives with our dumb tendencies to wander off course – and God's perfection... Jesus Christ our great High Priest closed the gap, so we can be enjoy endless fellowship with God.,. Together in the fellowship of God's universal Church, the catholic Church, we are a nation of little priests; all of us have access to God. Jesus' self-offering is perfect and complete...

So, is all this just academic theology?... I think not... It's all about our status before the Living God, whom we will all face, one great and glorious Day... Some of us might be tired or lonely; or life can be pretty frustrating. A practical fact is: Jesus is our great High Priest. We are changed. We belong...

Thanks be to God.