

Our Great High Priest

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday October 17, 2021

Hebrews 5:1-10

This morning we enter a book of the Bible that is foreign territory for many of us.

We are in Hebrews, which is written assuming that we have studied and meditated over the Hebrew scriptures, what we often call the Old Testament scriptures.

Jesus was raised memorizing, praying, studying, and meditating over those scriptures.

Jesus and the writer of Hebrews were also raised in a world where Priests, prophets and Kings were a part of everyday life.

That world is a great distance from ours.

But to hear the message and meaning of the scripture this morning we need to put ourselves in that world, so we will understand what this word of scripture means in our day.

First, for a moment, what does a Priest do and why?

A Priest is a go between, between God and the people.

A Priest is chosen by God to represent the people to God.

If there is one thing that I think we as Christians in this time have lost, it is a sense of the awe and reverential fear that is due to God.

When people, any people, all people encounter a heavenly being, sent from God, who reveals a fraction of God's glory, they cower in fear.

What would make shepherds afraid?

Men who lived in the wilderness, who faced all kinds of wild animals, were terrified when the angels appeared to them.

Isaiah cried out; "**Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.**"

Coming into the presence of the Most High God is not something to be taken lightly.

Serving at the altar of God as a Priest entering God's presence, is not to be taken lightly.

The people of God, after they had been rescued from the Egyptians were invited up to the mountain of God, to hear God's voice and receive God's commands.

They sent Moses in their place.

And the people were warned, after they had made that decision to not step foot on the mountain, or to let any of their animals on the mountain, or they would surely die.

Priests made intercession for the people, Priests, appointed by God, offered sacrifices both of thanksgiving and sin offerings on behalf of the people.

The priestly line of Israel came from the house of Aaron (Moses' brother).

But our passage this morning speaks of a different priestly line – the line of Melchizedek.

Abraham encountered Melchizedek, the story is recorded in Genesis 14, it is a much more ancient line, than Aaron.

Melchizedek was not an Israelite, but he worshipped the Most High God. He blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave an offering to him.

Melchizedek was a king and Priest.

Jesus is in the line of this Priesthood- ancient and unending.

And as the writer of Hebrews points out, Jesus' death and resurrection, his suffering and being raised by God to life, and raised to the right hand

of God the Father, made Jesus a priest of a whole different order and magnitude.

Jesus still knows all our weaknesses, all our temptations, all that sickens and destroys us- all the ways sin and death still cling to us. He is our brother, and yet he is so much more.

He is the sacrifice, the perfect spotless lamb, without blemish or fault, who was given for us once for all.

And he is the High Priest who prays for us- who makes intercession for us, who stands in the presence of God the Father praying for us.

Some years ago I was asked to visit a woman in her home, she had a terminal cancer diagnosis.

She had a matter of months to live.

Janice was a lovely person- 68 – she worked those couple extra years after 65 and with her retirement came her cancer diagnosis.

We talked, we prayed.

After a few visits I asked her if she would like me to bring communion to share with her.

She didn't want that, but she asked if she could be baptized.

The session agreed that I could do a home baptism, she was too sick to leave her house.

The elders, her family and I gathered, and she confessed her faith in Jesus as her Lord, and she was baptized.

I continued to visit, we continued to pray. Pretty soon she was no longer responding, and I wondered was she prepared to die, was she prepared to meet Jesus, prepared for judgment.

Over the years I've wondered other times.

And then I turn again to Hebrews, to the testimony about Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, born in Bethlehem, who walked the dusty streets of Jerusalem, who spent long cold nights in prayer on the hard ground, who wept in the Garden of Gethsemane, who knew the agony of betrayal, and the nails piercing his hands, who died, was buried, and was raised from the dead.

Jesus knew her and had been praying for her long before I met her. He knew her before she was born, he loved her with a love beyond my understanding. He heard her desire to be baptized, to come to him and be made clean. He had died for her so she could be forgiven for all her sins. He knew her pain in her illness, and remembered his own suffering.

That Jesus was appointed as her judge.

The one who died and was raised for her, who prayed for her, who accepted her prayer, her trust, her faith in him, as imperfect as it was, took her home to his glory, to the place prepared for her.

The words of the old Hymn- "*nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling*" (Rock of ages) is the truth of our faith.

We have no other hope.

We need no other.

Jesus is our prophet who speaks the word of God to us, he is our Great High Priest who lives to make intercession for us, and our King, who reigns over this world in love. Thanks be to God.