

18 March 2018
The Fifth Sunday in Lent

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“Priests in the Order of Jesus”

Text: Hebrews 5:1-10; Mark 10:32-45; Jeremiah 31:31-34

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we enter Passiontide. The last two weeks of the Lenten season. When we began this Lenten season, our alleluias were taken away, as was the *Gloria in Excelsis*, the hymn of praise we sing toward the beginning of the service. Today, even more is taken away. No more *Gloria Patris* - Glory be to the Father . . . either. And our cross is veiled. For soon, now, very soon, we will remember when *our Lord* was taken away from us. When He was arrested, tortured, and then crucified. Things are getting serious now.

And you hear it in Jesus' voice today, as He tells His disciples on their way up to Jerusalem, now it is all to take place. He had told them about all this before, but then it was all in the future. Now, it was going to happen. Now, the time was at hand. This was the last trip to Jerusalem. Perhaps you know a little how the disciples felt on hearing this news. When something you dread is coming, you can put it out of your mind while it is still months away and not think about it much. But when the day draws near, when the day comes, that knot in your stomach forms. It's different now.

Now, Jesus was going to lay down His life as our great High Priest. Now, He was going to be the sacrifice for the sin of the world on the altar of the cross. Both offering and offerer. The only one to do both. The only one who could.

Except there's a problem. And the author of the book of Hebrews recognizes it. And the problem is this: **Jesus is not qualified to be a priest.** He is descended from David, which means that He is of the tribe of Judah. But all priests had to come from the tribe of Levi, and in addition to that, and more specifically than that, be sons of Aaron. Jesus was neither. So how could He be our great High Priest?

Well, the author of Hebrews solves that riddle and answers that question by referring to something He found in the book of Psalms. Psalm 110, to be exact. From there, he quotes, that Jesus *is* a priest - but not the kind that came from Aaron. but a different kind of priest - *after the order of Melchizedek*. Melchizedek, whose priesthood was *greater* than Aaron's. Both because it came before Aaron's, and because it would last longer.

For Melchizedek was a priest long before God gave instructions for a Temple and gave

the priesthood of that Temple to Aaron and his sons. Melchizedek was a priest before the people of Israel even got to Mount Sinai where God gave them the Commandments and the instructions for the Temple. He was before the people had passed through the Red Sea, before their 400 years of slavery in Egypt, before they had gone to Egypt, before there were twelve sons of Jacob, before Jacob was even born to Isaac, and before Isaac was even born to Abraham. Long before all that, there was Melchizedek, *who was also greater than Abraham*. For he blessed Abraham, gave Abraham bread and wine, and received from Abraham a tenth of all he had (Genesis 14:17-20).

Now, the mention of those last few things should set off bells in your mind! For from whom do we receive blessing? Who feeds us with bread and wine? And to whom do we give our offerings? God Himself, of course. So Melchizedek is a foreshadowing, a prophecy, of Jesus, the Son of God who would come to bless us and feed us as our great High Priest. To bless us and feed us to eternal life. For as we heard, ***being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.***

Now that sounds a little funny, doesn't it? In two ways. First, that Jesus was ***made perfect***. We know that He was perfect, for He is the Son of God. Yes, but . . . Jesus is also a man. And so as a man, **as one of us**, He is perfected. Which means not only does He not sin, but that He perfectly fulfills every law, every prophecy, every commandment, every requirement, every *thou shalt* and *thou shalt not*, every jot and every tittle, every last little bit of God's Word. He is perfect, so that His death be not for his own sins - for He had none - but for ours. To pay for ours. To set us free.

And so Jesus dies, just as He told the twelve He would. He does His High Priestly work and offers His life for the life of the world. Before that, though, they heard the rest of that strange sentence; they heard Him pray in the Garden, to His Father, ***the one who was able to save Him from death***. And ***He was heard***, we are told. But it sure didn't seem like it! It sure didn't seem like it to those who saw His lifeless corpse being lowered from the cross, wrapped up, and laid in a tomb. It sure didn't seem like it that Friday night and that Saturday, when they would have said: Well, He prayed to the one who was able to save Him from death, but He wasn't heard. He died. He *wasn't* saved.

Except we know that He was. He was saved from death the same way you and I will be saved from death - not by avoiding death, but by being raised from the dead! **Jesus**, because He conquered sin and death; **you and I** because Jesus gives that victory to us. He went through it first so that we could go with Him. So yes, He is made perfect, He fulfills everything, perfectly, for us.

But here's the other thing, that **second** thing, that should have sounded funny to you in what we heard from Hebrews. For later in that same sentence it says that He was made perfect, and so ***became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him***. Now, to your Lutheran ears, that shouldn't sound quite right. We're saved by grace through faith,

not by our works; not because we *obey*. We heard that last week in the reading from Ephesians as well (Ephesians 2:8-9).

So how do we understand that? Well, the key to understanding that is that the word *obey* is formed from the word to *listen*. Jesus is the source of salvation to all who listen to Him, to His Word. For by the Word comes faith. From the Word comes the Spirit. From the Word comes forgiveness. From the Word comes our life. Jesus comes to us through the Word, and then with Jesus and His Word and Spirit, comes a new life. A new life of doing Jesus stuff. Of serving. Of laying down your life. James and John didn't get that yet. They wanted honor and the places of honor. The rest of the disciples didn't get it either, for they were indignant at James and John for asking for the places *they* wanted! They needed to listen to Jesus. That ***the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.***

So going back to Abraham . . . you know, he did pretty well when he listened. The Word and promises of God giving him faith and strengthening him, even to the point where he was ready to sacrifice his son Isaac as a burnt offering! But when he wasn't so good at listening, then came the troubles, doubts, fears, and He didn't do so well.

And isn't that the way of it for us as well? When we listen to the Word of God, hear it, take it to heart, rejoice in the promises given to us, remember the Word of our baptism, that we are children of God, dearly loved, that the forgiveness of sins is ours, and more, we do pretty well. But when we're not so good at listening, when the Word of God *doesn't* fill our ears and hearts and minds, how easy it is to go astray. Especially when times of suffering or trouble come upon us. It's easy to turn inward and not listen. It's easy to feel abandoned and alone, when we're not. We're not, because Jesus did that for you, too. He was forsaken that you never be.

So He is the source of your salvation, to all who hear, to all who listen, to all who are formed by the Word and live the Word. **For He was perfected for you, that you be perfected in Him.** Perfected because of the New Testament in Jesus' blood, by which God, as Jeremiah said, ***remembers your sins no more.*** *And how awesome is that!* He doesn't forget them - as if He forgets like we forget stuff. No. Your sins have not just been forgotten - because sometimes what we forget comes back again, right? No, ***He doesn't remember your sins.*** That's something very purposeful and intentional. He doesn't remember your sins, your failures, your ugliness, your wretchedness, all in your past that you are so ashamed of and hope no one ever finds out - He doesn't remember them because He dealt with them. He wiped them out by your High Priest's blood. And thus wiped out, they won't come back.

And with that, God has now made you His priests. That qualifies you to be His priests. The pastors are not the priests in the church, you are. You are the royal priesthood, as Peter calls you (1 Peter 2:9). The priesthood of the baptized. For again, as the author to the

Hebrews said, no one can make themselves a priest - only God can do that. And He made you His priest when He baptized you. And your role as priest is now to do Jesus stuff. To lay down your life for others, as a *living* sacrifice (Romans 12:1). For your spouse, your children, your parents, your co-workers, your friends, your neighbors. To lay down your life for others not because it's a rule or a law, but because that's what Jesus in you does.

And so you are priest. But what kind of priest? Not after the order of Aaron - we don't do those sacrifices anymore. Not after the order of Melchizedek. You are a priest in the order of Jesus. And that's a priesthood even greater than Melchizedek.

So we don't have to worry about the places of honor; Jesus has gone to prepare a place for you, and it will be just right for you. And you *have* been baptized with His baptism, and He *does* give you His cup here to drink - His, though at the same time they've been transformed for you. He took the baptism of fire, that He baptize you with the baptism of forgiveness. He drank the cup of wrath, that He give you His cup of blessing. And He comes to give them to you and serve you. That *you* be great ones. Listening *to* Him, learning *from* Him, and living *in* Him.

So now we go up to Jerusalem, these last two weeks of Lent, and hear again of our Saviour's death, and hear again what kind of God we have. A God willing to die **for you**. So our song is not a song of greatness. At least, not worldly greatness. Greatness as we usually think of it.

*My Song Is Love Unknown,
My Saviour's love for me,
love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.
Oh who am I? That for my sake,
my Lord should take frail flesh and die (LSB #430)?*

So, **What do you want me to do for you?** Jesus asked James and John. I think that's enough! But how would you answer? What would you ask for? How do you answer? What do you ask Jesus for in your prayers? How about simply this: *O Lord, who remembers not our sins, remember me when you come into your kingdom.* Because you know who said that? One of those given a place beside Jesus, on His right or on his left, in His glory, on the cross. And you do pray that, in the Lord's Prayer: *Thy kingdom come.*

Jeremiah told us the day is coming, and it is now here. Now, Jesus tells his disciples, it is all to take place. Now it is going to happen. Now the time is at hand. This is the last trip to Jerusalem.

Will it be your last trip? Your last Lent? Well, none of us knows if this is our last Lent or not, but this we do know: this is not our last trip to Jerusalem. For the day coming for us is not Jeremiah's day, but Jesus' day, the Last Day, the Day when He will raise us from the dead and take us with Himself to the *heavenly* Jerusalem. And just like for the

disciples, that day may seem fearsome for you when it is no longer far away; when it actually comes - but it need not be. For you have a *great* High Priest, an *eternal* High Priest, a *risen* High Priest, who is the source of eternal salvation. **Yours.**

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.