

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fifth Sunday in Lent

March 21, 2021

Psalm 119:9–16 (ESV):

9 How can a young man keep his way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

10 With my whole heart I seek you;

let me not wander from your commandments!

11 I have stored up your word in my heart,

that I might not sin against you.

12 Blessed are you, O LORD;

teach me your statutes!

13 With my lips I declare

all the rules of your mouth.

14 In the way of your testimonies I delight

as much as in all riches.

15 I will meditate on your precepts

and fix my eyes on your ways.

16 I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word.

First Reading: Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV):

The New Covenant

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, 32 not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. 33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

EPISTLE: Hebrews 5:1–10 (ESV):

For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

6 as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus 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. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 10:32–45 (ESV):

Jesus Foretells His Death a Third Time

32 And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, **33** saying, “**See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. 34 And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.**”

The Request of James and John

35 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” **36** And he said to them, “**What do you want me to do for you?**” **37** And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” **38** Jesus said to them, “**You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?**” **39** And they said to him, “We are able.” And Jesus said to them, “**The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, 40 but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.**” **41** And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. **42** And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “**You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**”

Sermon 12 – Fifth Sunday of Lent

“Jesus Stands In”

Hebrews 5:1-10

Dear friends,

Our epistle lesson comes from the book of Hebrews today, and it is short, and I'm already regretting this even though I haven't even started. Life choices aside, the author of Hebrews says a few things here about priests, and then extrapolates those few things into one thing about Jesus. The point He is making about Jesus is incredibly obvious but good to restate, like so much of our Christian faith. Jesus is who He is, we are who we are, and one of the reasons Jesus is who He is is because we are who we are. What do I mean by that? Well, let's get into it.

This is Hebrews, which means it is overloaded with Old Testament references as you might expect. This particular reading is light on that thankfully, and the rest of the chapter will be too, but chapter 4, which comes before this, is not. All throughout chapter

4 the writer is trying to draw connections between Old Testament concepts and events with New Testament concepts and events. As the name makes clear, the book of Hebrews was written to Hebrews, Old Testament people who grew up with that as their Bible. These people wanted those connections drawn. Think of what would happen if I came to you and said to you that the Bible that you had been taught as kids, the Bible your grandparents grew up with being taught by their grandparents, wasn't the Bible anymore. There was a new message from God, a new book to read instead. You would be extremely skeptical, and you would be right to be extremely skeptical. You would need a lot of proof, a lot of time to absorb that idea, that this is the new Bible. This is what the writer is doing for these Jewish Christians. They need to see the connections between the Old Testament and the New. All they knew was the Old Testament, it was the Bible as far as they were concerned, and they needed to be sure that this new thing was actually the word of God. Again, picture if I came to you with a whole other book telling you that this new book was the word of God instead. I would have to prove from the Bible we have that this is on the level. Chapter 4 specifically spends all this time getting the Hebrews around to the idea of heaven, the need for redemption and how that connects to heaven, and the faith necessary for you to be redeemed. In chapter 5, he shifts focus not just to how that redemption is delivered, but Christ's special, unique role in it.

Because this is so small, we're gonna really chop this up to chew on the words. **“For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.”** Believe it or not, this is an example leading to his point. Problem is, he's using a common denominator that would make total sense to Hebrews but is outside our experience. Every Jew raised in a good Jewish family knows what a high priest is for. For you, it's less so, so let's change the illustration. You know why I'm here. I'm here, as your pastor, to be your go-to for all things Bible, Jesus, and whatever else I can help you with. In worship, I'm not just here to lead it, I'm here to stand in a specific place in a specific role. In the worship service, I'm here to bring your

words to God, and God's words to you. That's why I'm always turning around, turning back around, walking from here to there. Your pastor is supposed to be God's literal voice for you when He speaks God's words to you. I forgive you all your sins. Take eat, this is my body, given for you. I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The pastor is supposed to be the human voice and human face of God's presence. We don't have sacrifices anymore, but we do have gifts, like God's Word, the waters of Baptism, the Lord's Supper. These gifts are not mine they are God's, and in this age of few go-betweens, it might seem odd to need one with God, but for whatever reason God has structured His church this way, and here we are. But again, this is an example. The writer wants you to think of your pastor when you think of Jesus, and that's the case that he's making.

“2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people.” So the writer keeps going on this. Your pastor is a man, he is not God, even though he speaks for God he doesn't do so out of his own hook. I am not infallible, nor do you expect me to be. I am not perfect, and you've been gracious about that. But regardless of who is in the job, and what strengths or weaknesses he brings to the table, the pastor is meant to represent and speak to you on behalf of God. The writer to the Hebrews clues us in on one of the reasons God might've designed this to be this way. I am a sinner. All your pastors are and will be. As sinners, we know full well what the pain of sin is like. We know full well what it is to be guilty. We know full well what it is to lose, to die, to get sick, and so on. I can sympathize with you because I am a man trying to raise a family and do meaningful work and screwing up every part of it, just like you do. We have this in common. Your pastor is not you, but he is not above you. He's not better than you. He's from among you. We have things to teach each other, and things to learn from each other. It is a mutually beneficial relationship built on our mutual need from God. I'm not just bringing your offerings to God, I bring my own. I'm not just forgiving

your sins, I'm receiving forgiveness for my own. I'm not the giver of God's gifts, I'm the receiver too. We're all sinners together you and I, stuck in the trenches of this world, taking artillery fire, lice, and boring days alike. God knows how people think. God knows that sinners need other sinners to show them the value of God's Word and His ways and His forgiveness. God knows that when I tell you how serious sin is, you can be sure I am speaking from hard experience of my own sins and the damage they've done to my family and my life. When you want to be free of alcoholism, who do you go to for advice? The guy who used to be an alcoholic and kicked the habit, or the teetotaler who's never had a drink in his life? God knows how much it means to you to have someone who's been there and done that, who knows the pain, strife, and joys of life, which is why He continues to insist on sending you men to be your pastors, rather than angels or something else.

“4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.” I can testify to that firsthand. Been nearly five years since I was called to serve y'all here and I didn't even know where Lander was when the time came. Only God can make a pastor, and only God can decide where and when they do their work. This accounts for some odd mismatches, but it only goes to show just how directly in charge God is of all this process. More to the point of what Hebrews is talking about, God is the one who makes His voice heard, and God is the one who appoints men to be His voices. If God does this, then that means something for what Jesus is to us, which is what he's building toward.

“5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you” Jesus didn't ask to be what He is, He was called to it by God. I know you guys know this, but again, remember the audience here. These people need to be convinced on the basis of what they know that Jesus is God and should be listened to like we listen to God. So the writer to the Hebrews uses the process as evidence. He says to these folks, look, the priests you

listened to were appointed by God, right? You listened to them as God's voice, right? Well, so was Jesus. He didn't ask to be God, He just was God, and here's where He said that He was. Here's where God appointed Him for this job. If God did this, then you can listen to Jesus just like you would listen to your high priest. Great. For you, I would say the same thing, despite the fact that you probably don't need to be convinced at this point. Jesus was God and you should listen to Him as God, as the final authority in your life. God says explicitly to Jesus, you are my son, today I have begotten you, and that means that when Jesus speaks to you, God is speaking to you. You can augment this proof with Jesus' resurrection. People don't come back from the dead. In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus predicts He will do just that, and then He did it, which we're about to celebrate at Easter. So, on the basis of all of this, you guys can know for certain that these words you hear, from Jesus, are the words of God, because Jesus Himself is God.

What about all the stuff beforehand? What was that for? All that applies to Jesus as well. Jesus has no sin, that is the only thing He doesn't have in common with us, but it is the only thing He doesn't have in common. Everything else, Jesus shares with us. He shares our humanity, and the burdens of it. He shares our frailty, the fact that we easily die. He shares our worries, the need to work and earn a living, the cares that come with family and friends. He knows it all. This is why He is your high priest, this is why He is your Savior, and this is why you can trust Him. I urge you to see this as the link between you and Jesus, simple humanity, the day-to-day chores of living. Jesus had to schedule bathroom breaks and find materials for his construction business both. Jesus had to pay bills. He was so very human, and so are you, and that is why He is your Savior. When you pray to God, you do not pray to a God who does not understand you or cannot see you. That is what the devil wants you to believe. No, you pray to Jesus, and He brings your prayers to God, and this Jesus knows what it is to be you.

More than just sympathy is replacement, and this is the case that Hebrews is trying to make. Jesus is your stand-in, because your sin means you cannot stand before God on

your own. Jesus is your keeping of the Old Testament, because those laws could never be fully kept. He is your righteousness, because you don't have any. He is your compassion when you are empty of it. He is your energy when you are tired, the good that you cannot be. He is everything you are and everything you are not all in one, so that God is pleased with you, you are part of Him, and that you do not have to fear His anger because Jesus took that anger for you.

Amen.