

November 18, 2018

Hebrews 10:11-25

***“Let Us . . .”***

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 2155 North Oakland Ave., Decatur, Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

One of the major themes in the epistle to the Hebrews is that Jesus is our priest. The word “priest” occurs thirty-three times in the epistle. That’s quite a number when you compare it to other epistles in the New Testament, where it appears only once in Romans and three times in Revelation. The problem for most of us is that we are not all that familiar with the office of a priest as the Jews would have been at the time of Jesus. What is a priest and how is it connected to Christ? We really need to answer that question before we can begin to focus on the rest of our epistle lesson for this morning.

In Hebrews 5:1, we have an excellent definition. It says, “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.” The high priest, or any priest for that matter, was the representative of the people - a mediator or bridge between man and God. The priest stood with the people toward God. The priest would offer gifts and sacrifices for the sins of the people. But, these priest of the Old Testament were only a picture of the person and work of Jesus Christ, just as our epistle lesson hints, “And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins (Hebrews 10:11).”

The priests of the Old Testament reminded the Israelites of their sin and their need for a Savior to represent them before God. Only the priests could offer sacrifices on behalf of the people at the altar of burnt offering. Only the high priest could enter into the Most Holy Place, which was considered to be the dwelling of the living God and heaven. The high priest could enter only once a year on the Day of Atonement, which foreshadowed the day of our Savior. And, since even the high priest was an imperfect picture of the great high priest who was to come, he had to offer a sacrifice for himself and then a sacrifice on behalf of the people. Again, the priests only reminded the people of their need for the Savior.

Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:5 that “there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Our Lord Jesus then is the fulfillment of what the priest foreshadowed. So it happened that when the Son of God became flesh, Paul says that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself (2 Cor. 5:19) and, “having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him reconciled all things unto himself (Col. 1:20).” As you can see, the word “priest” takes us all the way back to the height of Old Testament worship, and the silence of the multitude in the moment of reconciliation with God through the work of a mediator.

And what is reconciliation? To be reconciled means to be brought together. To be brought together implies that beforehand the two parties were apart or separated. Indeed, mankind has separated himself from God. That takes us to the reality of sin. At the base of sin lies enmity with God. It says in Colossians 1:21 that we were at one time “alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” Mankind’s hostility against God has made God the enemy of mankind. It says in Romans 1:18, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” Enmity between God and man is, therefore, a reciprocal relationship. It is the real illness. Thank God that Christ faced the whole ugly reality of the problem and became our High Priest. God made the whole world acceptable to himself through Christ’s sacrifice for our sins, as Paul writes, “For our sake he

made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).” God gave our sins to Jesus and credited his righteousness to us.

Again, thank God that Christ faced the whole ugly reality of the problem and became our High Priest! Thank God he offered up himself as the Lamb without blemish and without spot! “Here we have the perfect priest, the perfect high priest, offering the perfect sacrifice of himself,” as Oswald C. J. Hoffmann writes: “Being true man, He could take another man’s place; being sinless, he could take upon himself another’s sin; being the eternal, omnipotent God, he could become the substitute for all mankind. By his sacrifice, once offered, he has obtained an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12) and has perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14).”

Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, and by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. And with that, we are brought to what follows in our epistle lesson. What follows the discussion about the priestly role of Christ are three hortatory subjunctives, better known as “let us...” statements. They are a call to a collective action, including the writer and reader. The action is called for as a result of the priestly role of Christ. Here are the three statements:

1) “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”; 2) “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful”; and 3) Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

Once again, three “let us...” statements: “let us come near”; “let us hold fast”; and “let us consider one another.” It is because of everything that Christ has done for us in his priestly office that we are urged or exhorted to do such things. In Christ, we are able. Let’s take a closer look at these statements.

First, let us draw near to God. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” In Baptism, we have been given an identity with Christ. All our sins, no matter how great they may be, have been washed away. Having been touched by the name of the only God who saves us, we are his. Consequently, we are invited to draw near to God with hearts that are clean and consciences that are truly at peace. The hostility between us and God has been removed and we have nothing to fear now or on the day in which Christ will come to judge the living and the dead.

Even now we draw near to God by faith and bring him our prayers and praises. This is one of the benefits that come with having Christ as our high priest. God hears our prayers favorably as Jesus says good things about us. He invites us to pray to him, and he promises to hear us and answer our prayers in such a way that they will work for our salvation. We do this individually in everyday life and we do so collectively whenever we gather together. Because Jesus is our priest forever, we have access to God forever. Let us then draw near to the throne of grace, confident that we may receive mercy and help.

Second, let us hold fast our confession. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." There are many things in life and in our world that would cause us to let loose of our confession and hope: disappointments - failures - adversities. Everyday we are under the pressure and persecution and mockery of this unbelieving world. Everyday, we are tempted to just give up. We can either grow weary and discouraged and finally acquiesce, or we can hold on. Jesus is our priest who sacrificed himself for us. He has secured an eternal future that is firm and unshakable. This is his promise. He is faithful to his promises. Just as Christ has risen from the dead, so will he also raise us and bring us to our everlasting rest in him and all that he gives. Because the victory is even ours now by faith, we will not be intimidated or driven to lose the prize.

And third, let us encourage one another: "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Let me say it again..."not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some." This is not a law about church attendance. It isn't setting forth a number. Rather, it is a strong warning or urging. When the opportunity is there to gather around Christ in the means of grace with those who are also of Christ, don't set it off to the side as if it is unimportant. Christianity is not just a matter of "me and Jesus," as though you live in an isolation chamber. To be a child of God means that you are a part of a spiritual family. As a spiritual family we are to spend time together in order to mutually encourage and console. We share in each others joys and sorrows. The Day is approaching.

And until that day, we know that we have a great high priest who has atoned for all our sins and who is standing for us as our own high priest in heaven. Therefore, beloved, let us draw near to God with a true heart in full assurance of faith. He is merciful, and he will hear our prayers. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. He who promised is faithful, and he will deliver on his promises. And let us consider how to stir up on another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another all the more. God has brought us into his family, the church, and he has done so for a purpose.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott