

Wednesday - Oculi, 2016

March 2, 2016

Hebrews 4:15-16
(Primary Text)

Luke 22:24-30

Only Jesus

Grace, Mercy and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Happy Hump Day. Don't worry; there are no talking camels or other marketing tricks here to capture your attention and imagination. This homily is not sponsored or approved of by anyone; no geckos; no ducks, and perhaps somewhat sadly, not even any settlers.

Nevertheless it is a hump day as we find ourselves not only in the middle of the week, but also in the middle of Lent. These forty days are about half spent, and accordingly, this year's Lenten series is at the midway point. So as we turn our attention to our theme hymn, it's not surprising that today/tonight we consider the third of the five stanzas of Chief of Sinners Though I Be.

The appointed wide view of this Lenten season focuses on the Sacrament of Confession and Absolution. Each week, the forgiveness of your sins has been declared to you from this Nave, Chancel and Pulpit. Beginning with the Imposition of Ashes, and the Service of Corporate Confession and Individual

Absolution on Ash Wednesday, our loving Father has continued to show you His loving kindness throughout this season of preparation and repentance.

The narrow view of this week of Lent focuses us on Jesus, and the Balm, Peace and Joy that only He can impart. The third week of Lent is known as Oculi; that is, “eye, or, to see”. Fittingly, in today’s/tonight’s text God shows us how we are to see our Savior.

Our Epistle reading illustrates and reveals to us the profound nature of Christ as our High Priest. Hear the Word of God:

FOR WE CONTINUE TO HAVE NOT A HIGH PRIEST THAT DOES NOT SYMPATHISE WITH THE WEAKNESSES OF US, HAVING BEEN TEMPTED IN ALL WAYS IN ACCORDANCE WITH OUR LIKENESS, YET, WITHOUT SIN. WE MAY CONTINUE TO DRAW NEAR THEN WITH BOLDNESS TO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE MERCY, AND MIGHT FIND GRACE IN WELL-TIMED HELP.

Throughout the book of Hebrews, this role of Jesus our High Priest is emphasized time and time again. The author speaks of Him as “a merciful and faithful High Priest”, “a great priest”, “a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens”. What does this mean? He is revealed to us as the means by which we approach our Father. Jesus is our Mediator, Intermediary and Advocate.

There is no doubt that Mr. McComb penned the following stanza of our theme hymn with those words in mind:

Only Jesus can impart

Balm to heal the wounded heart;

Peace that flows from sin forgiven,

Joy that lifts the soul to heaven;

Faith and hope to walk with God

In the way that Enoch trod.

Those first two words are the foundation for what follows. Those two words, “only Jesus”, are as profound as any found in our Lutheran Service Book. And I might even stack them up against Pastor Palmer’s prized two words of “But God”; maybe.

“Only Jesus” captures the essence of that Hebrews text. Those two words boil it down to its elemental form. Our High Priest sympathizes with us because He knows our weakness, intimately. He was tempted in all ways like we are. Not only does He know our temptations, He also knows our transgressions, fully, because He bore them. No one else could accomplish this. Only the Sinless One could take on our sin. Only the One who was holy could make us whole. Only the One who is unblemished could be and make the sacrifice. Only Jesus!

This Jesus is the one who passed between Earth and Heaven. He is the One who bridges the Creator to His Creation; the Holy to the Common. And not only does He cross over, He also reaches out to us that we too can come before the Father. It is in the Son of God that we find merit, and only in Him that we have life. When we understand Him as our Mediator, Intermediary and Advocate, then we rightly see Him doing all things necessary to bring us to the Father eternally.

First, we see in the hymn what our Savior grants us presently. He (and only He) imparts to us balm, or comfort, to heal our wounded heart. We are in need of healing aren't we? The devil, the world and our own sinful flesh prevent us from living the lives that we were created to live. Our struggles dog us and overshadow our very existence. Illness, sadness, guilt and sin have left us bruised, beaten and helpless. Thanks be to God, the Son of Man knows us, your, condition and carries you, us, through this veil of tears and heals you now and eternally.

How does He heal you? Ultimately, as Mediator He took your deserved punishment on Himself. Presently, He heals you through means, in the manner that He established. He once called you His own through the waters of Holy Baptism. He regularly feeds you through His body and blood in, with

and under the bread and wine at His table. And He daily forgives you your sins and the sins of all who have a repentant heart.

Unlike our High Priest, we fail when we are tempted; you and I cannot atone for our own sins. Without faith in the Worthy Lamb of God, there is no pardon for our transgression. But through His absolution He imparts to us, to you, the peace from sins forgiven.

Because your sins are forgiven through the merit of the blood of our High Priest, our Intermediary, you are made right with God. His Blood stands eternally as the culmination of the Old Covenant atonement sacrifice. Thousands and thousands of years ago, once per year, on the Day of Atonement, sacrifices were made by the High Priest to Yahweh on the Throne of Grace. Those sacrifices continued generation after generation so that atonement could be made for the sins of the people.

But then about two thousand years ago the Old Covenant was fulfilled by the only One who could fulfill it. His final sacrifice was offered on the cross. Due to His sacrifice, now we come boldly before God's throne of grace through the merit of our High Priest's blood and the joy that only Jesus can impart which lifts our souls to heaven. Now He lives as our Advocate, pleading our case with the Father with no one there to accuse us.

And so we are drawn back to the closing words of the third stanza; the Enoch part. (Pause) You've been waiting for this haven't you? To be sure, not too many hymns mention Enoch, and probably about the same number of hymns contain stanzas that end with the word "trod". So who was Enoch and why do we sing about his "trodding"?

Scriptures tells us that he was an early prophet, "the seventh of Adam"; he was the father of Methuselah and great grandfather to Noah. We know that he only lived 365 years, unusual for those times, but even more extraordinary is the fact that he did not die. According to the fifth chapter of Genesis, "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him". This is remarkable and noteworthy in two aspects – one that God took him, and two, that he walked with God. Later in Hebrews we learn that he pleased God. So is this what our hymn-writer expects of us? When he writes of "faith and hope to walk with God in the way that Enoch trod" isn't he setting the bar a little too high?

By no means; because this isn't about Enoch. It's about Jesus – only Jesus. He is the One on whom we set our eyes. He is the sinless High Priest, our Mediator, Intermediary and Advocate. He is the One who imparts faith and hope to walk with God. It is His faith. Only on His account do we hope to walk

with God, to approach his throne of grace, to receive His gifts of mercy and well-timed help.

This Hebrews text points us to Christ as our High Priest. Not surprisingly Chief of Sinner Though I Be isn't the only hymn drawn from this cutting of Scripture. No less than a dozen different hymns attribute Hebrews 4:15-16 including;

- *Once in Royal David's City,*
- *What a Friend We Have in Jesus,*
- *Kyrie! God Father in Heaven Above,*
- *Lord Jesus Think on Me, and*
- *Amazing Grace.*

But for today/tonight we center our attention on our office hymn's third stanza. Hear God's Word declared to you from the King James Version, and hear in those words the inspiration for the hymn writer:

FOR WE HAVE NOT AN HIGH PRIEST WHICH CANNOT BE TOUCHED WITH THE FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES; BUT WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN.

LET US THEREFORE COME BOLDLY UNTO THE THRONE OF GRACE, THAT WE MAY OBTAIN MERCY, AND FIND GRACE TO HELP IN TIME OF NEED.

And so we respond out of thanks; thanks to the Spirit who continues to grant us “oculi” to see God’s mercy and peace, thanks to the Son who continues to impart all manner of blessings to us as our High Priest, and thanks to the Father who continues to bestow on us the riches of His throne of grace.

The Peace that passes all understanding, which comes from only Jesus, guard your hearts and minds in Him. AMEN

Dcn Thomas Honebrink

Catalina Lutheran Church

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