

Christ Was Appointed

Lent 5

Pastor Josh Frazee

Heb. 5:1-10

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

In our Old Testament text last week we heard about God's appointed speaker, Moses, and how the people of Israel spoke against not only God but also Moses as God's chosen leader. At the beginning of the book of Hebrews, we find that "Long ago, at many times and in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world (Hebrews 1:1-2)."

Our text this morning continues to differentiate between the prophets and priests of old and our ultimate high priest, our Lord Christ Jesus.

Our youth catechism students have also been hearing about the threefold office of Jesus: as our Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus was the last great Prophet because He made the last prophecies regarding the End Times, and He Himself fulfilled God's plan for our justification. Jesus was, and continues to be, our King, continuing to rule over our world from His place seated at the right hand of God the Father. Today's text from Hebrews demonstrates how Jesus was our ultimate Priest in making the sacrifice for our sins even though He Himself had never sinned. This is in contrast to every other priest, as the author of Hebrews tells us at the beginning of our text.

Verse 1

"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. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifices for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was."

None of the Old Testament priests chose to become priests. They were appointed to this duty among the descendants of Aaron, just as Aaron himself was appointed and did not choose this vocation for himself. This appointment had continued from the Old Testament times in Leviticus to the time of our Epistle text. That's how the author of Hebrews can write in the present tense that the high priest "can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward." The author of Hebrews was making the point that the chief priests to whom some of his hearers as Jews or Jewish converts to Christianity had looked or were still looking had indeed been chosen by God. Yet they had been chosen to fill the part of priest for a designated amount of time. Their office was not to be an eternal one. The way that the author knew this was because the chief priests had all been human, and, as such, sinners. They had to offer sacrifices for their own sins just as they had done for the people. But now, the author was pointing out, a new priest had come who had made a once-for-all sacrifice as one without sin.

In the same way, the true prophets of the Old Testament didn't choose to become prophets, either. Moses was called by God but backed out of speaking for Him, desiring that Aaron speak instead. Jonah was called but fled until he was swallowed by the great fish. But there were false prophets in the Old Testament times, about whom God spoke to the prophet Jeremiah: "'I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds (Jeremiah 23:21-22).'" They were not called by God but spoke whatever they wanted to speak. They were not appointed as prophets but chose to go.

As with the prophets, pastors today do not choose to become pastors. Men may choose to go to the Seminary, but they do not become pastors until they have received a call to a particular congregation. One of the earliest examples of this is in Acts chapter thirteen where God the Holy Spirit said, “‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.” If you’ve been to an ordination service recently, you’ve seen how the brothers place their hands on a new brother under-Shepherd as he takes his vows to serve in the call into which God has called him.

Verse 2

“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’; as he says also in another place, ‘You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.’ 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.”

Once again, just as the Old Testament priests and prophets did not choose to be made God’s instruments, Jesus did not “exalt himself.” Rather, He humbled Himself by becoming a man. As a man, He did not always demonstrate His Godly power and knowledge. Rather, He served. It was at His baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration that God begot Him, just as it had been prophesied before in Psalm two. In His state of humiliation, Jesus was begotten and made a priest after the order of the Genesis priest Melchizedek. This was also prophesied before in Psalm one hundred ten.

Remember last week how Moses had interceded for the people of Israel, both when they built the golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai and also when God had sent the fiery serpents among them. Jesus also offered up “prayers and supplications” both for the people, but also for Himself, that the cup of His death might be taken from Him. He prayed this of His Father, “who was able to save him from death, and he was heard.” Luther wrote of Jesus’ praying that “In the same manner He also fulfilled the third part of the priestly office: intercessory prayer. Along with, and beyond, His sacrifice Christ also prayed to God the Father in our behalf (ESV Study Bible Commentary, p.2110).”

Yet like when Moses prayed that the serpents might be taken from the people of Israel and God left the serpents among them, God did not answer Jesus’ prayer as He had desired either.

Verse 3

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.”

Because Jesus humbled Himself to death, even death on the cross, His Father would raise Him from the dead. After He had revealed Himself to His apostles, His Father would have Him ascend into heaven to be seated at His right hand, from which He will be coming to judge the world at the end of time.

In the meantime, Jesus continues to offer prayer for His Church, continuing to act as Mediator between God and you and me. He also continues to speak to His Church through His Word, as we hear in Luther’s Small Catechism: “As Prophet, Christ...(2.) through the preached Gospel today still proclaims Himself to be the Son of God and Redeemer of the world.” As Jesus Himself said in the Gospel of Luke: “‘The one who hears you hears Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me (Luke 10:16).’”

So Jesus continues to our Prophet and King, having fulfilled His duty as Priest in sacrificing Himself for our sins. We continue to hear His Word in the proclamation of the Law and the Gospel; and we continue to live under His reign as King, even now. Yet living under His reign will be even better when He has returned, judged, and taken us into life everlasting to live with Him forever. In Jesus' Name. Amen.