

The First Sunday In Lent

February 17, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Hebrews 4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (NIV)

When people need some kind of help you will often hear those people say they want someone who can relate to them? Do you agree? A student who has to work hard and struggle to get C's might not want to hear a lecture on study habits from the brainy rocket scientist who only had to look over the material once to get an A. Would you take a parenting class from an expert who never raised any children? Do you like it when a friend who has never been married constantly gives you advice for your marriage? There is a reason support groups are made up of people who have had the same struggles. We want help from people who have been in the trenches with us, have had to deal with the very same problems, and have had the same experiences as us. When we are in trouble we want someone who can relate to what we are going through, don't we?

Dear friends, today we hear an awesome truth that our greatest help comes from a Savior who can relate to us. Today, we are reminded Jesus has been in the trenches and has gone through the same experiences as us. The Son of God is the perfect one to help us in our time of need. We will consider now how: **We have a Great High Priest who is just like us and yet nothing like us.**

We are not told to whom this letter called Hebrews was written. However, we are able to know with certainty several things from the content of this letter. One is they were people from Jewish background as the author quotes repeatedly from Old Testament passages and makes many references to the worship life of the Old Testament Israelites. Secondly, these people were under heavy persecution for their faith in Jesus. These Jewish Christians were in danger of wavering in their faith and lapsing back into Judaism to avoid persecution. So the author of this letter has been building a strong case for how Christ is far superior, and that includes anything the rules and regulations of Judaism had to offer.

Did they want to go back to having a visible high priest? He was the only one who once a year, on the Day of Atonement, would enter the Most Holy Place in the temple. He would enter God's presence and sprinkle blood of animals for his sins and the sins of the people – a vivid reminder sins needed to be atoned for and paid for with blood. The priest would intercede for the people. Perhaps because they did not see Jesus they began to wonder and have doubts if they really should go back to the old ways of doing things as some were telling them. But that would be very foolish "***since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens.***" Jesus did much more than enter behind some curtain in the temple. He appears before the very throne of God. He appeared there after offering Himself as the once for all sacrifice for sins on the cross. To

this day Jesus appears before the throne of God to intercede for us and point to the sacrifice He made for our sins.

If they think because Jesus is now ascended back to heaven that He does not see or He does not care or He can not help them in their struggles, they could not be more off the mark! ***“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.”*** What a remarkable truth this is for a people who are struggling, a people with one problem after another, and a people who are being persecuted. We have a great high priest who knows our weaknesses because He is not only the Son of God but also Jesus, true man.

Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has faced every single thing we have faced. Jesus knows what it is like to be hungry, and thirsty, and tired. Jesus understands what it is like to stand outside the grave of a dear friend with tears running down His cheek. Jesus has felt real pain. Jesus knows what it is like to carry burdens in life. Jesus can relate to having things weigh heavy on His heart - so much so that, in the Garden, He declared: ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.”*** Jesus understands what it feels like to have friends betray and abandon Him. Jesus has experienced pouring out His heart in prayer to the Father, only to hear the Father answer His prayer that He prayed three times with a “no.” The cup would not be taken from Him, for His Father knew this was the only way. Jesus, more than anyone, understands suffering. He knows what it is to face death. In fact, Jesus knows what it is to die.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.” Jesus can relate to how the devil is right there tempting us every step of the way – in every trial, at every turn, and with every temptation possible. Jesus faced them all. He understands the craftiness and cunning of our enemy. We watch the battle we read about in our Gospel lesson this morning. With temptations even more fierce than we shall ever know hell’s full arsenal stormed against the Son of God. After 40 days of not yielding, angels came to strengthen Jesus.

We have a great high priest who is able to relate, able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses - one who is just like us! Yet, we also see this great high priest is nothing like us. And thank God for that! For Satan has defeated us again and again and again. Just as Adam and Eve were no match for his cunning in the Garden, neither are we! The devil has us falling for his lies daily. He gets us to satisfy our selfish wants rather than put the needs of others first. He actually gets us to doubt God and trust in ourselves. He turns our attention and worship away from God and His Word to other things. The devil definitely knows how to prey on our weaknesses, doesn’t he? What pet sins does he keep you going back to? How often does the devil get the best of us in our weakness?

But not Jesus! He was ***“tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.”*** Jesus was not born with the same sinful nature you and I had at birth. Jesus never gave into actual sin. Jesus resisted at every turn. He won the battle verses the devil daily. He wielded perfectly the weapon of God’s Holy Word. He worshiped the Lord His God and served Him only. Jesus is nothing like us. The good news is through faith Jesus’ victory has become our victory. Jesus is not only our high priest but our Great High Priest. This was never said of any other Old Testament high priest. Not even the

first one, Aaron, was called great, but only this priest sent from God, only Jesus. Jesus is our Great High Priest because only He could make atonement for sin. And this is what Jesus who is “Himself the Victim and the Priest” did. He made the perfect sacrifice – Himself on the cross. And His empty grave assures us God accepted His payment.

Why would we need any other high priest? Instead, this author calls for two other actions. Did you catch them? “*Since we have a great high priest....let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.*” Now, in time of trouble, it is not the time to turn away from Jesus, but to hold onto Him more tightly than ever. And secondly, “*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*” Perhaps you remember what happened when Jesus gave us His spirit and died on the cross. Matthew records: “*At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.*” Jesus, our great High Priest, has granted us free access to God our Father. We are able to approach now His throne of grace freely, confidently, at all times and bring our requests as Martin Luther says as dear children asking their dear fathers. We are able to bring our every problem, our every need, to God and the Lord always answers – with His mercy – and with His grace – in a way that is best for His children.

If you are like many people who want someone who can relate to you when you need help, take comfort today! Jesus knows your hurts, He understands your pains, and He is just like you in that He has faced every trial and temptation that you face. But more than that rejoice that Jesus is nothing like you, for Jesus remained without sin for you, and then He poured out His own life-blood to wash all your sins away. Now God’s mercy and grace are always here for you. And you can be sure that Jesus is still here, ready to go into the trenches with you to help you in your battle against the devil each day. Hold firmly, dear friends, to the faith we profess! Approach the throne of grace with confidence daily! For we have a great High Priest – the only one we need! Amen.