

Because He's Been There

by Linda Rex

October 20, 2024, Proper 24 / After Pentecost—In my last blog I looked at what our passage in Hebrews said about who Jesus is, and how that impacts our understanding of who we are as the beloved children of God. In this week's lectionary passage from the New Testament, Hebrews 5:1–10, the author begins to make a case for how Jesus Christ, as the Son of God who came to take on human flesh, steps in and takes on the role of high priest for us. The role of high priest was originally filled by someone from the tribe of Levi, the branch of the ancient nation of Israel which had been given the responsibility of the priesthood.

The responsibility of the high priest was to represent the people of ancient Israel in their covenant relationship with God, offering gifts and sacrifices at the altar as commanded by God, and offering the Word of God and God's grace to the people. This ministry of intercession via the priesthood was a gift of grace from God, providing a way in which a sinful, broken people could be reconciled with their Redeemer—the One who had rescued their nation from slavery at the hands of the Egyptians and made them his very own people.

The author of Hebrews brings up an important point—that the priest was selected from among the people—a brother of those who came to worship at the tabernacle or temple. Because this priest was one of them, he was just as broken and weak and disobedient as they were. And this enabled him to minister to them with compassion and understanding. This is a reminder to those of us who are called into pastoral ministry, or any other type of ministry in this world, to be well-acquainted with our own shortcomings, to face and deal with them honestly and humbly, and to allow this truth to temper our care of others with compassion, understanding, and mercy.

In Jesus' case, he understood our frame as human beings because he, as the Son of God, took on a truly human existence. But he did so without ever allowing the many temptations he experienced to draw him into sin. Unlike us, he did not sin, though his genuine human experience covered a wide range of our human existence.

Jesus hammered out, so to speak, a truly human life lived out in obedience to his heavenly Father in the face of temptation and suffering and death, and he conquered evil, sin, and death in the process. As Jesus lives now in face-to-face union and communion with his Father in the Spirit, he intercedes on our behalf, knowing full well all that we go through and struggle with on a daily basis. And he intercedes on our behalf with great compassion and understanding.

The obedience Jesus perfected was that of bringing our human flesh, in all its rebellion and disobedience back to God, back into humble obedience and dependency upon his Father in the Spirit. Jesus forged within us the capacity for us to receive the indwelling Spirit who writes on our hearts and minds all that God commanded his people to obey. Jesus lived a perfect human life of obedience to his Father in the Spirit, bore our human flesh through death into resurrection, ascending into glory, bearing our glorified humanness into his Father's presence to remain there forever in right relationship with God in the Spirit. In the gift of the Spirit, each of us individually can begin to participate in what Jesus made possible in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension.

And as our ascended Lord, Jesus reigns as the King of Righteousness (the meaning of Melchizedek), the High Priest appointed by his Father to offer the ultimate sacrifice—himself. As the One who judges, Jesus was judged on the cross, allowing himself to be crucified on our behalf. We have no reason to be afraid in coming to God with our sins, faults, weaknesses, and failures. We have Jesus Christ to intercede for us, to stand in our place, to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice in our place on our behalf. He pleads our case, and does so with great mercy and

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compassion, because he's been there—he knows what it's like to be us in the midst of this broken, messed up world. He prays our prayers to his Father, perfected and acceptable in God's sight. And he offers the things of God to us in the Spirit, so we can share in his own right relationship with his Father in the Spirit. And Jesus loves us—so much so, that he laid down his life for us. Jesus has forged for us a life in right relationship with his Father and offers this to us in the gift of his Spirit, so we can live in God's life and love, now and for eternity. What could be more wonderful than that?

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for giving your Son to us for our salvation and redemption. Thank you for giving us your Spirit so we can begin to participate in your own divine fellowship as Father, Son, and Spirit. We are so grateful, Jesus, that you understand us, care about us, and are always interceding for us on our behalf. Grant us the grace to ever live in grateful obedience. Amen.

“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness; and because of it he is obligated to offer sacrifices for sins, as for the people, so also for himself. And no one takes the honor to himself, but receives it when he is called by God, even as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify Himself so as to become a high priest, but He who said to Him, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you’; just as He says also in another passage, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’ In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, being designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” Hebrews 5:1–10 NASB

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death, because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” Isaiah 53:4–12