



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 10, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: "O God, Our Help In Ages Past"

Arr. Roger Wilson

Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We light this candle as a sign that Christ has come and Christ will come again. As the light pushes back darkness let us walk with, learn from, and worship Jesus Christ.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Liturgist: Lord, satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

All: May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to your children.

Liturgist: May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us. *Psalm 90:14-17 adapted*

All: Let us worship the Lord our God in spirit and in truth.

* **All Singing: 521 "Come Thou Fount"**

* GOD'S GREETING

* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

* **All Singing: 565 "God Himself Is with Us"**

Children ages 2–7 may come forward for a brief word and blessing before they leave for “God Loves Me” and “Children in Worship.”

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also, with you.

Reconciliation

Liturgist: The word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

All: Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Liturgist: But we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

All: For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.

Liturgist: Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 4:12-16 adapted

Silent Confession and Reflection

All Singing: 623 “God Be Merciful to Me”
Singing verses 1-3

Liturgist: When Jesus the Christ had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

All: The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this, saying: This is the covenant I will make with them, I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

Hebrews 10:12-16 adapted

*** All Singing: 682 “Before the Throne of God Above”**

Liturgist: Listen then to how the prophet Amos describes grateful, faithful, living;

I hate, I despise your religious festivals; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them. Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.

All: But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Amos 5:21-24

Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Soloist: "Almighty God" arr. Andy Piercy

This prayer, called the Collect for Purity, dates back to the 10th C.

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
All desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.
Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit,
That we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify
That we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-16

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: The Imprint of Humanity

* **All Singing: 157 "Meekness and Majesty"**

Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Liturgist: With joy, let us now offer our gifts, in music, heart, and resource, as a sign of our deep devotion and covenant faithfulness.

OFFERING

1. General Fund
2. Trinity Christian College

Offertory: "Have Mercy on Me" Porters Gate

The goodness of the Lord is the kindness of the Lord, with every breath we take,
the gift of life and grace. The power of the Lord is the meekness of the Lord,
who bore humanity with brave humility.

Let Your mercy flow through us, Your mercy, Your mercy.

The beauty of the Lord is the suffering of the Lord, is Christ upon a tree, stripped
of dignity. The glory of the Lord is the mercy of the Lord, gives life for us to see a
new humanity.

When they see us, may they see Your mercy, Your mercy.
When they know us, may they know Your mercy, Your mercy.

Bless the hands and feet of those who serve in need,
of the broken and ashamed.
Bless the weary soul, the Lord will make us whole;
God, speak peace to those afraid.
May the words we speak build a bridge for peace—
Your lovingkindness shows the way.
Open up our doors, giving refuge for all the weary and afraid.

* **All Singing: 358 "Give Thanks"**

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Sending

BENEDICTION

Minister: Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Hebrews 13:20-21 adapted

* **All Singing: 938 “My Friends May You Grow in Grace”**

Postlude: “Lord, Be Glorified/Sanctuary”

Arr. Fred Bock

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist:	Dora Diephouse	Acolyte:	Norah Van Wyngarden
Pianist / Vocalist:	Erin Pacheco	Liturgist:	Kris DuBois
Vocalist:	Lori Evenhouse	Prayer:	Nate Pettinga
Guitarist:	Jenson Varghese		
Percussionist:	Clay Carlson		
Violinist:	Frances Boerman-Cornell		
Minister:	Roger Nelson		

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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Text: Hebrews 4: 12-16
Title: The Imprint of Humanity
Date: 10.10.21
Roger Allen Nelson

My father was murdered in an armed robbery an arm's length from me and Sandi.

I was a seminary student at the time and time soon came when I had to return to class. One would think returning to a community of men and women training to be pastors would be a comfort. One would be wrong. It was awful. I was lost and limping and my classmates wanted to talk about God's sovereign will and how this would shape my ministry. They offered pious platitudes; I pulled away.

However, two seminary professors had buried sons who died in their early twenties. One boy died of cancer and the other by suicide. I didn't know the boys; I barely knew the fathers. But something in the way in which those two professors moved toward me made me realize that they got it. They got the loss and the grief and the struggle to just breathe. They got it in their bodies. They got the absurdity and the trauma. And it was physical. One professor never spoke with me but I saw or felt his empathetic pain.

The other professor was wise and dearly loved; I sat in the back of his classroom and barely spoke. He stopped me in hallway and asked how I was. I have no idea what I answered. But in that conversation, he told me that if God himself wrote out the reasons why he had taken his son, and then handed that note to him, he would crumple up the paper and throw back in God's face for there would never be reason enough. There would never be reason enough.

I felt like someone understood.

Someone knew what I knew.

Someone gave words to what I only knew as groans.

Someone was empathetic in his bones, in his mind, in his soul....

Turns out that was the most important conversation of my 4 year decidedly mediocre seminary stint.

The author of Hebrews (the preacher) writes that Jesus is able "empathize with our weaknesses." The actual word in Greek is *sympathesai* from which we get sympathize. The word only shows up in one other place in the New Testament and that's in Hebrews 10 when the preacher writes that this early church congregation "suffered along with those in prison."

Now. I don't want to get into the weeds about the difference between empathy and sympathy. The word gets translated both ways depending on your translation. The point is that Jesus is able to identify with,
understand,
feel,
suffer with,
have empathy for,
be compassionate,
and in fact, embody our weaknesses.

That's a remarkable claim.

Last week we noted that Jesus is imprinted with the nature of God. This week the preacher writes that Jesus is imprinted with the nature of humanity. That he is actually "just as we are..."

Frederick Buechner puts it this way:

The incarnation is a kind of vast joke whereby the Creator of the ends of the earth comes among us in diapers... Until we too have taken the idea of the God-man seriously enough to be scandalized by it, we have not taken it as seriously as it demands to be taken.

But! The physicality is the easy part of the scandal.

Jesus is one of us with diaper rash, acne, and seasonal allergies. Jesus is just as we are with sleepless nights, thirst, and sunburn. Jesus is one of us in puberty, in being moved to tears, and in death. And while those realities are hard to square with one who is the same essence as God, I am more stumped by the claim that Jesus empathizes with our weaknesses and has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet did not sin.

Earlier in Hebrews the preacher writes that Jesus calls us brothers and sisters because he "shared in their (our) humanity...."

He had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Again. There's that line about being like us in every way.

I have dark thoughts, have struggled with addictions, and have a relentlessly restless soul. I know folks who are trapped in depression, struggling with mental health issues because of childhood trauma, or are lost in the fog of a neurodegenerative disease....

And yet, the gospel claim is that Jesus is just like us - has empathy for our weaknesses! Jesus gets the loss and the grief and the struggle to just breathe. He gets it in his body. He gets the absurdity and the trauma. And it's physical. In his bones, mind, and soul he gets it. He gets what it means to be human....

And in that there is great comfort. Amen?

However, I'm hung up on that line about being like us in every way except for sin.

Mostly because I don't know any human being that is without sin – however you define sin. So, I don't understand how Jesus can be like us in every way except for that little caveat about sin.

Because then he's not like us....

I found this helpful from Thomas Long:

The claim that Jesus was “without sin” does not take away from his humanity; in fact, it underscores it. Jesus embodied what God, in creation, intended for human life. To say that Jesus was without sin is not to say that he was 99 percent human – human in every way except for the fact that he was without sin – but rather to affirm that Jesus experienced the full ambiguity and uncertainty, the weakness and vulnerability, the temptations and sufferings of life without compromising his humanity, without straying from his calling to be a human being.

I like that. The humanity of Jesus is not without struggle but is in fact what God intended for humanity. That is to say that Jesus is fully human and fully God. And therefore, Jesus stands uniquely between us and God.

A couple years after my father’s murder we were part of a dramatic trial. The judge was a measured man who had been listening to violent crime cases in Cook County for decades. The accused was facing his third felony conviction. The defense attorney didn’t usually make courtroom appearances but this was a high-profile case. He wasn’t about to pass it off or pass it along.

Sandi and I were newly married and overwhelmed. We didn’t know what to do or expect. We sat across the aisle from the accused and his family – his son, his parents, his siblings. It was unsettling. We didn’t know what to think or say. I felt weak. All we had was our experience of loss and what we remembered of the murder.

But we were assigned a southside, Irish-Catholic, attorney. She was confident, composed and compassionate. She stood with us and beside us and in front of us. She straddled the gap between us and the judge. She was for us. She faced the judge and made our case. And when we were required to give a “victim’s impact statement” she faced us, helping us find the words and the courage and the clarity.

The analogy breaks down and it misses the richness of how a High Priest functioned in first century Judaism. But the gospel claim of Hebrews is that Jesus straddles the gap between us and a holy God.

He turns his face to us and to God.

He has empathy because he knows our weaknesses.

He has standing with God because he was without sin.

That mystery gets formalized in the creeds and councils of the church.

For example, the Belgic Confession puts it this way:

These are the reasons we confess him to be true God and truly human: true God in order to conquer death by his power, and truly human that he might die for us in the weakness of his flesh.

That’s at the core of an orthodox understanding of Jesus: Jesus was fully human and fully God. A logical-rational-impossibility. A profound gospel truth.

But what does it mean for us?
Does it make any difference?
Is it something more than theological formulary?

Dear friends I've noted in the past that this line of work affords me a front row seat to the human condition. I see folks in all manner of situations and conditions. And from that perch it seems to me that there is a universal longing for someone who gets it. We all long for someone who has empathy. We all long for someone who knows our experience in their bones, in their minds, in their souls. We know when its faked. We know when its honest, felt, shared....

The good news is that God in Christ gets it. God in Christ shares in and has empathy for the human condition. Jesus bears the imprint of humanity. We have an advocate who is like us in every way....

Rob Bell stacks-up words this way:

Gospel is the shocking, provocative, revolutionary, subversive, counterintuitive good news that in our moments of greatest despair, failure, sin, weakness, losing, failing, frustration, inability, helplessness, wandering and falling short God meets us there – right there – right exactly there – in that place, and announces, I am on your side.

Thank be to God.
Amen.