

Sunday 28th October 2018

The Last Sunday after Trinity

Proper 25 Green



Collect

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: help us so to hear them, to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest them that, through patience, and the comfort of your holy word, we may embrace and for ever hold fast the hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Hebrews 7:23-28 English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.

7²³ The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. ⁵Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost^[a] those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. ²⁶For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. ²⁸For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Footnote: a. That is, completely; or *at all times*.

COMMENT: This excerpt continues the author's discourse about the supremacy of Christ as priestly mediator of a better covenant than that of the Levitical priesthood. Behind this passage stands the custom of the high priest of the Jews entering the holy of holies once a year on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) to offer the blood of an unblemished lamb to atone for his own and the nation's sins. The argument may seem complex for a modern audience, but presumably would have seemed quite cogent to those Jewish Christians familiar with their Jewish religious tradition and anxious about its relationship to their new faith. Such a concern would have been especially strong in the decades immediately following the destruction of the temple in AD 70. Several points of reference to both the Jewish tradition and the passion of Christ begin in verses 23-24 by noting the temporary character of the Jewish priesthood in contrast to the permanence of the priesthood of Christ.

The key to this discontinuity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, although this is only indirectly stated in the final clause of verse 24, “because he continues forever.” An Old Testament character is given as the model – the Priest and King *Melchizedek* to whom Abraham gave a title of his possessions (Genesis 14:17-18). As the king of Salem (Jerusalem) this had a resonance with the Christian image of Jesus. *Melchizedek* entered the realm of Jewish legend as being an immortal Priest. The next phase of the argument develops around Christ’s suitability for the priestly office. He is unique in holiness, innocence and purity, all of which resulted in his having an exalted position in heaven due to his death, resurrection and ascension (verse 26). Whereas on the Day of Atonement the high priest of Judaism offered an annual sacrifice for his own and the people’s sins, Jesus offered himself on the cross, once for all, and thereby removed the necessity of repeated sacrifices required under the older system. Jesus thus becomes both the eternal high priest and the perfect sacrifice (verse 27). Finally in verse 28, we have an even more obscure reference to “the word of oath (which) appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.” Oaths had an important place in the life of the Jewish community. They invoked God to validate the reliability and permanence of particular relationships, be it a legal, economic or personal relationship. The most common form of oaths in the Old Testament can be found in several passages in 1 Samuel, “As the Lord lives” In other words, The LORD was called to witness that the relationship being sealed by the oath was valid. In New Testament times, the Essenes of Qumran made prevalent use of oaths; but Jesus urged that they be completely omitted (Matt.5:34; cf. Jas.5:12). Paul, however, did use oaths in Gal. 1:20, 2 Cor. 1:23 and Phil. 1:8. It is probable that this statement in Heb. 7:28 refers to God’s validation of the Sonship of Jesus Christ. It was, after all, the story narrated in four gospels and the New Testament letters which reveal and attest who Jesus is and what God did through him. This is the central message of the Letter to the Hebrews too.

Mark 10:46-52 English Standard Version (ESV)

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus

10⁴⁶ And they came to Jericho. And as he was leaving Jericho with his disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the roadside.⁴⁷ And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴⁸ And many rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”⁴⁹ And Jesus stopped and said, “Call him.” And they called the blind man, saying to him, “Take heart. Get up; he is calling you.”⁵⁰ And throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.⁵¹ And Jesus said to him, “What do you want me to do for you?” And the blind man said to him, “Rabbi, let me recover my sight.”⁵² And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.

COMMENT: Mark’s Gospel consists not only of “the Jesus Story,” but also a narrative which described the essence of faithful discipleship for Mark’s readers. The healing of the blind man in Jericho reiterated this point which Mark had been making throughout his gospel and would bring to its fulfilment in the Passion narrative he was

about the begin. Bartimaeus of Jericho was the last person to respond to Jesus before he began his final approach to Jerusalem and the cross. Since the declaration of his Messiahship at Caesarea Philippi (8:29ff), Jesus had been making his way slowly south from Galilee toward the holy city. As he went, he consistently taught his disciples about his pending death and resurrection (8:31). They neither understood him nor recognized the cost of following him. Indeed, the final mistake they made was to fight among themselves who among them would have precedence in the messianic kingdom they believed he was about to establish (10:32-45). How could they have been so blind? That, of course, was exactly what Mark had been saying. The disciples had been both blind and deaf. Yet many of the miracles of healing Mark reported had been to give sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf (7:31-37; 8:22-26). Jesus had also reiterated several times the cost of being his disciple (8:34-38; 9:30-32; 10:17-22; 42-45). They just did not get it. Mark lays the emphasis on the man's faith as the key to being healed. Faith in Jesus not only gave Bartimaeus back his sight, but a spiritual healing enabling him to follow him "on the way." This contrasts dramatically with the spiritual blindness and disbelief of the disciples even though they had been with him all the way from Galilee. In this instance following Jesus "on the way" could mean going with him up to Jerusalem and to the cross. Or it could also be interpreted by Mark's audience in later years as "the way of discipleship." In Acts, the early church is described as "the followers of the way." Since this was the last episode in Mark's narrative before he began telling of the death of Jesus, we can presume that he fully intended both meanings. The discipleship of true faith is costly. That remains as much so today as it ever was. The cost of discipleship is still as great as ever; but fewer people are willing to undertake the self-sacrifice involved. Could it be that it isn't because they have not heard that message, but because they have heard and realize full well how much it will cost to follow Jesus in the way?

Psalm 34 *Benedicam Dominum*

℟ The poor man called; the Lord has heard him.

¹ *Of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away.*

² I will bless the Lord at all times,

his praise always on my lips;

³ in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.

The humble shall hear and be glad. **℟**

⁴ Glorify the Lord with me.

Together let us praise his name.

⁵ I sought the Lord and he answered me;

from all my terrors he set me free. **℟**

⁶ Look towards him and be radiant;

let your faces not be abashed.

⁷ This poor man called, the Lord heard him

and rescued him from all his distress. **℟**

⁸ The angel of the Lord is encamped
around those who revere him, to rescue them.

⁹ Taste and see that the Lord is good.
He is happy who seeks refuge in him.

✠ The poor man called; the Lord has heard him.

**Glory be to the Father, and to the Son :
and to the Holy Ghost;
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be :
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This psalm declares an almost absolute trust in God to provide all the answers to life's great questions. Emphasis placed on humility (verse 2), however, gets lost amid repeated summonses to praise (verses 1,3,8) and reassurances that God does respond to prayer (verses 4-6). Nonetheless, the caveat remains that only the righteous can have such a relationship with The LORD. Much could be made of the metaphors in verse 6 and their representation of traditional Old Testament views of how God intervenes within history. An angel encamped around those who fear The LORD recalls the frequently used military name for The LORD, "the Lord of hosts". The epithet occurs no less than 267 times and was originally associated with the tribal confederacy at Shiloh (1 Sam. 3:1,11). It variously referred to angelic bodies gathered in The LORD's name to defend Israel or to the army of Israel itself. "Fear of The LORD" is often interpreted as reverence, but this is not credible in this instance. Coincidence with the militaristic terminology recalls the ancient narratives about Israel's struggle to survive throughout the patriarchal period and the millennium before this psalm came into existence. Although the superscript suggests that it was of Davidic origin, this is not so. The psalm belongs to a limited set using the acrostic format where each line begins with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This artificial form, came into use late in the literary history of Israel. It was designed as a pedagogic practice to aid memorization or to give complete expression to an idea or emotion. No question can be raised about the religious fervour of the psalmist in using this poetic style. Christians have frequently made use of verse 3 as a call to worship. The superscript itself exemplifies an even later type of Hebrew interpretation.

Post Communion

God of all grace, your Son Jesus Christ fed the hungry with the bread of his life and the word of his kingdom: renew your people with your heavenly grace, and in all our weakness sustain us by your true and living bread; who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen**

The Blessing

Christ the Son of God perfect in you the image of his glory and gladden your hearts with the good news of his kingdom; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among *you*, and remain with *you* always. **Amen.**