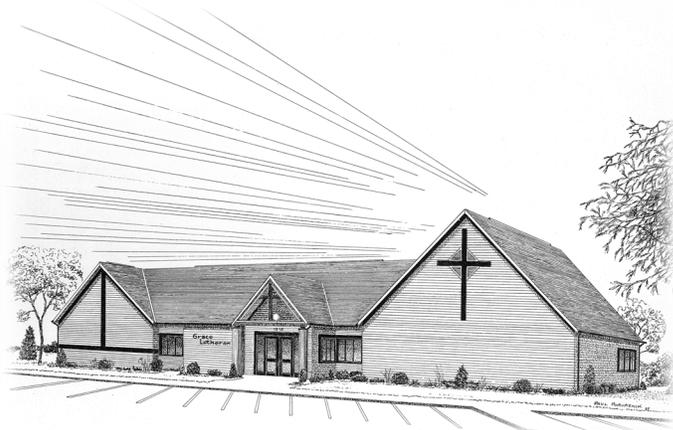


Midweek Advent 2
December 9, 2020
Pastor Daniel Naumann
Psalm 110:4

THREEFOLD OFFICES OF CHRIST: PRIEST



Last week we talked about Jesus' offices. Remember that as we did so we noted that an office can refer to different things, but when we speak of Jesus' offices, we mean to describe three distinct facets about Jesus. Each office of Christ—Prophet, Priest, and King—describes where Jesus works, what work he does, and what authority he has to do that work. So, as the great Prophet, Jesus works wherever God's Word is proclaimed to speak sins forgiven to God's people with the authority of speaking directly to all mankind from God.

Well, what about Jesus' office as Priest? How does that describe Jesus' work, his place of work, and the authority of his work? This is perhaps the most foreign of Christ's offices to us for a number of reasons. First of all, we don't really have priests today. Yes, I realize that we call clergy in some other denominations "priests," but we don't typically call our clergy "priests," and even priests of other denominations don't really function the way a biblical priest did. What is a priest, and what did a priest do? While we may not have priests who function like Old Testament priests, we respect Scripture enough to know something of their history and function, don't we?

Aaron, the brother of Moses, from the tribe of Levi, was the first High Priest of Israel. And while he had many varying duties, we want to focus especially on two this evening. He was supposed to represent the people before God, and also represent God to the people. In his representation of the

people, Aaron would pray for them. He would pray on their behalf and offer incense as a symbol of those prayers rising to God. But Aaron also performed an even more profound function as priest. He would offer more than prayers. He would offer sacrifices for the people. The blood sacrifices, the animal sacrifices of the Old Testament are profound, in many ways grotesque, and yet immensely picturesque. God communicated to his people through these sacrifices this one great message summed up in Hebrews 9:22, *"And nearly everything is cleansed with blood according to the law. And, without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness."*

There is perhaps no harsher law preached to us than that message. It is the sum and substance of what our sins deserve. They deserve death. They deserve bloodshed. And the blood that ought to be shed is not the blood of animals. Those animal sacrifices could not placate God's wrath and anger. They could not appease his judgment. No animal sacrifice would do to actually take away the sins of the people. That's why the writer to the Hebrews makes the point in the next chapter (10:1-4) that if the Old Testament animal sacrifices actually took away sin, they would have stopped doing them as soon as the people were cleansed. But they didn't take away sin. They didn't forgive. They served one purpose only—to remind the people of their constant need for forgiveness. It was the peoples' blood that deserved to be shed for their sins.

So, you see, no Old Testament priest would do, just like no animal sacrifice would do. That's where Jesus comes to us as our great High Priest. And what does Psalm 110 tell us about Jesus' priesthood? Wasn't he from the tribe of Judah, from the line of

Mary and Joseph, a son of David? I thought he was a king!? Kings and priests do not come from the same family, or even the same tribe, in the Old Testament. David's line from Judah was separate and distinct from Aaron's line from Levi. So, how could Jesus be a priest? *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the manner of Melchizedek'" (Ps 110:4).* Jesus was superior to any priest of the Old Testament, Levitical line.

Jesus' office of the priesthood is perhaps the most profound of his three-fold offices. It tells us where his work was accomplished. As the High Priest of God's people, Jesus performed his sacrificial work on the cross. And here is how that work is different. Jesus cut through all the ceremony of the Levitical priests, ceremony which had to be repeated. But Jesus' sacrifice was made once for all, and it was made on the cross. And in an astoundingly profound way, Jesus was not only the Priest who made the sacrifice, he himself was the sacrifice. It was not the blood of an animal that would cleanse us. It was the blood of the Son of God. And that blood shed for us actually forgives sins. And just like we noted before, since this sacrifice on the cross by Jesus actually forgives sins, it actually cleanses us and purifies us from all sin, it never needs to be made again. *"Christ [died] once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" (1 Pt 3:18).*

Jesus was a superior High Priest. He was the best. He was the perfect Priest and sacrifice for us. You are forgiven. That's what he came to do. He came to cleanse you. He came to forgive you. He came to shed his blood for you. What a perfect representation of humanity Jesus made before God. He became sin for us to take away our biggest problem of all! And then he turns around, risen from the dead, and represents God to us whenever he pronounces that forgiveness which he accomplished for us on the cross. That is Jesus' profound work as he functions in his office of Priest. And the place where he carries out that work is the cross. Then pronounces its results through the Gospel as it is proclaimed to you.

But by what authority does Jesus do this work of Priest? This is where we have one of the strangest and most mysterious types of Christ in the whole Old Testament. It's a figure known to us as

Melchizedek. Jesus' carries out his duties by the authority of Melchizedek. Jesus wasn't in the line of Levi, so he couldn't be a Levitical priest. Instead, he is in this order—in fact Jesus himself *is* the entire order—in the manner of Melchizedek. We know almost nothing about this man named Melchizedek. He is mentioned in Genesis 14:18 as the King of Salem, which was quite possibly Jerusalem long before David took it over. So, he is a king. But Melchizedek was also uniquely a priest, as our Psalm for this evening (Ps 110:4) points out. The only other place Melchizedek is talked about is in Hebrews chapter 7. There we are told that Jesus performed his duties as Priest in service to the Most High God from Melchizedek's order in a way that no other earthly priest could ever have done. He paid for our sins, and he did it on God's preordained authority—entirely unique, entirely trustworthy, entirely acceptable to God.

How can you be sure? How can you be so sure that Jesus had the authority to do all this from such a mysterious line as some guy we know almost nothing about named Melchizedek? Well, Psalm 110 answers that. Very simply, it's because God promised it was authoritative. *"The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever, in the manner of Melchizedek.'" You see? That is Jesus' authority. He is not just a priest. He is the Priest who sacrificed himself on the cross to accomplish forgiveness for you, and he did it on God's sworn authority. There is no doubt, this is Jesus' work as Priest, and it is acceptable to God for you. Amen.*

