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Lent 5 • Hebrews 5:1–10 • March 22, 2015
Sermon Notes

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Too often when we quote from Ephesians 2 we stop at verse 9, but the Apostle Paul goes on to instruct us about the second kind of righteousness, the active righteousness that is still God’s work in us, his work of art or workmanship. This active righteousness is the good works that he wants us to do, that he has prepared in advance for us to do. Good works are not necessary for our salvation. They do not define our relationship before God. But they are necessary in our lives for the good of our neighbor, and they describe our relationship before our neighbor. God is at work in this world, to love the world, through us, as we love one another.

What does that look like? Consider the law written on our hearts, summed up in the Ten Commandments. Luther’s explanation to each commandment, especially the second table of the law which describes our relationship to our neighbor, not only says what we are not to do, but also states what we are to do: how we are to treat our neighbor and look out for his/her interests.

What does this look like? Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 to encourage us to be imitators of God as dearly loved children, to live lives of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. We desire to be more and more like Jesus. Jesus lives his life in us and through us (Gal 2:20). Someone has said that we are to be Jesus’s love with skin on it.

Paul goes on in Ephesians 5 and 6 to describe how this work of art that God is doing in our lives, the good works that he has planned in advance for us to do, shows itself in our relationships: husband and wife, children and parents, employee and employer. It is reflected in our vocations as we relate to one another in our families, our work, our civic responsibilities, and our congregational life (see also Luther: Table of Duties).

Secure in our relationship with God (by grace through faith – first kind of righteousness) we are empowered by God to live as God’s people in this world, loving God, by loving our neighbor (Mt 22:37–40), using all that God has given us to serve him, as we find him in our neighbors (Mt 25:40) as the “Masks of God” (Luther).

Wally Becker

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**Editor’s note:** The following homiletical help is adapted from Concordia Journal, September 1979.

**Lent 5 • Hebrews 5:1–10 • March 22, 2015**

Bartelt: Lent 5 • Hebrews 5:1–10

**Sermon Notes**

1. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews continues his discussion of the “high priesthood” of Christ (and his commentary on Psalm 110) in 4:14. The importance of the office of high priest was obvious to a Jewish audience (even if the office had been corrupted by contemporary human machinations), and the assertion that the role of high priest had reached its completion in Christ was no doubt striking. In the Old Testament, the high priest wore the names of the twelve tribes on his breastplate as representative of the people as a whole (Ex 28:29), and on the Day of Atonement only he...
entered the Holy of Holies (the one time a year anyone was allowed to enter) to sprinkle blood on the “mercy seat” or propitiatory (the lid of the Ark of the Covenant), both for the sins of the priests (especially his own) and for the sins of the people (see Lv 16). The Letter to the Hebrews (already in 2:17) shows Jesus as the fulfillment of this priestly office, and, as is often the case, the fulfillment (or antitype) is far greater than the prophecy (or type) itself. Not only does Jesus offer the ultimate (“once for all”) sacrifice, but he also is the sacrifice (7:27). Furthermore, he does not need to sacrifice for his own sins (as the human high priest did in 5:3) since he is sinless (7:26).

2. This pericope (5:1–10) is a nicely rounded section, beginning and ending (in Hebrew inclusio style) with a reference to the “high priest.” Two qualifications of a high priest are noted in verses 1–4; they are discussed in reverse order in verses 5–6 and 7–8, with the saving result noted in the final verses.

3. The first quality required of a high priest was that he must be able to sympathize with those whom he represented (vv. 1–2, also 4:15). For a “sinful” high priest this included offering sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people (v. 3). The sinless Jesus, of course, did not have to do this, but he is no less a high priest. He, too, can “deal gently” with the “ignorant and wayward” (the sins here are those of ignorance and inadvertence), not condemning their sins but atoning for them. The real humanity of Jesus is taken up in verse 7 and following (“in the days of his flesh”), and it is clear that our Lord can certainly sympathize with those whom he represents as high priest and mediator. Indeed, he has suffered more than any other, offering prayers and supplications of agony (cf. Ps 116). He, too, “learned obedience” as he prayed three times in Gethsemane, giving himself up to the will of God, and he was heard “as a result of his godly fear” (not “because of”), which may well mean true fear and trembling more than simple piety. Thus, Jesus’s identity with all humanity focuses upon his humiliation and suffering (see Phil 2:6–8).

4. The other qualification required of a true high priest was his divine appointment—not “taking the honor upon himself,” but “being called by God, as Aaron was” (v. 4). The high priesthood of Jesus is even greater than that of Aaron, as the writer shows by combining quotes from Psalm 2:7 (v. 5) and Psalm 110:4 (v. 6) to document the divine appointment of Christ, who is both Messianic king (Ps 2) and priest (Ps 110) as well as truly “Son of God.” (Note the contrast between Christ’s divinity and humanity: a Son, yet he suffered—v. 8.) The enigmatic Melchizedek stands out as the one Old Testament figure who was both priest and king (recognized by no less than Abraham in Genesis 14) and is therefore a type of the kingly priesthood (or priestly kingdom) of the Messiah.

5. The end result (telos) of Christ’s high priestly work, which was “made perfect” or complete when he himself cried, “It is finished,” is the “eternal salvation of all who obey him” (v. 9). The present participle indicates constant obedience (“continue to obey him”), which is not obedience as to the law (which only reflects the sins for which this great high priest has offered atonement) but the obedience to the faith (cf. Acts 6:7). With Christ the whole Old Testament system of sacrifice and priesthood is fulfilled: the ultimate sacrifice is made. The “priesthood of all believers” is fulfilled (Ex
19:6, 1 Pt 2:9); the priestly role of the pastor is to forgive sins by pointing to the sacrifice already made by Christ.

**Suggested Outline**

**Jesus Has “Been There and Back”**

Introduction: Real sympathy often comes from those who have experienced the same situations. As our great high priest, Christ suffered more than we could ever bear.

I. The role of the high priest in the Old Testament was representative of the people.
   A. He had to be “one of them.”
   B. He was to be their mediator before God.

II. Christ is an even greater high priest.
   A. He is truly “one of us.”
      1. He was human, tempted.
      2. He learned obedience to the will of God.
      3. He suffered.
   B. He is greater than we are.
      1. He is the Son of God.
      2. Though tempted, he never sinned.
      3. What he suffered was far worse than our suffering; as both priest and victim, he suffered the wrath of God on sin for all men.

III. As our representative, Christ brings us into “identity” with him.
    A. Primary is identity with his death—for us. His obedience earned our salvation.
    B. Jesus also knows our temptations and sufferings.
       1. There is nothing we can ever face that Jesus has not already experienced.
       2. There is nothing we can ever suffer that Jesus has not suffered more severely.
    C. As priest and king, Jesus brings us into the “obedience of faith” by which we live in his kingdom.

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**Exegetical Notes**

Verse 6: Our English too often comes off sounding like Jesus was something less than God, as if he merely appeared to be God. However, a distinction between μορφή and its synonym ἐνδος is that μορφή can indicate that Christ’s appearance is the reflection of his true substance. Jesus has the form of God because he is in every sense of the word God. Paul concludes verse six “(Jesus) did not count equality with God a