

March 16, 2005
Midweek Service 5
Exodus 28:1, 2, 15-17a, 21, 29-31, 33, 35-38
Pastor Ott

We See Jesus Acting As Our Go-Between

There has been a problem between you and someone at school or you and someone that you work with, and whenever you go to talk to them, they won't talk to you. They won't acknowledge you. They turn and go away. What do you do?

A husband has cheated on his wife. They are no longer living under the same roof. He desperately wants to convey how sorry he is and wants things to work out, but whenever he calls the phone goes "click". What is he going to do?

When there is a problem between two people and they won't talk to you and you really want things to get right, aren't you going to find someone, a friend, to go talk to that other person? A friend to go talk to that co-worker—a friend to go talk to your spouse to serve as a go-between to bring the message that you so desperately want them to hear. That picture is exactly what our reading from Exodus is painting for us this evening.

The problem is between God and his people. His people can't approach God directly because they are sinners. They are separate from God. They need a go-between—a mediator. That is exactly what the role of the High Priest was to be—someone who would represent the people to God and represent God to the people.

This evening as we look at these regulations about what they were to wear, about the color of yarn, about the nature of bells and some kind of breast plate, you might wonder "what has any of this got to do with anything in my life?" But as you look at this Old Testament ceremonial regulation, what you see in these shadows is Jesus serving as our go-between. Jesus represents us to God. Jesus brings us all the blessings God wants us to have as he reunites us and makes us a part of God's family. Even in this uniform that we see the High Priest wear, we see Jesus acting as our go-between. What we are reminded of tonight is that is a **one-way work**. It is only one direction. And then secondly, we see that it is a **one-man job**.

When there is a problem between people, let's say between you and a friend, more than likely it's because you both screwed up at one time or another, right? We are sinners. We do stupid things. We say hurtful things—sometimes intentional, sometimes not intentional. In order to make things right between us, we both usually have to acknowledge that we have done things wrong. We both have to give a little. But when it comes to a mediator between us and God, that's not how it works. This is all **one-way work**. In reality, the work of the High Priest really pictures that for us as we consider it this evening.

God had said to Moses, *"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity*

and honor.” Aaron’s robe, his uniform, was a symbol of his role in bringing God’s people back to God. It says it was to give the High Priest “*dignity and honor*” that when the people saw Aaron in his full High Priestly garb, they would see that he was there to represent their interests to God. They couldn’t approach God directly because they were sinners. They were separate from God. Even the High Priest himself could only approach him in the way that God described because sin separates us from God. Anything that we do cannot bring us back to God.

So God had said to Moses, “Here is the uniform he is going to wear”. And all of it is really a reminder that they needed a go-between. They couldn’t go to God on their own. They were to make a breast plate of gold. It was folded over and stitched together in a different colored yarn. On the front of the breast plate they were supposed to put 12 precious stones. On each of those stones they were to inscribe the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. It was a reminder to the people and to Aaron that whenever he went into God’s presence, he had to be wearing this as a reminder that he was representing the people. He didn’t go there on his own. He wasn’t going there in his power and his might. He was going there because God had said to him, “You are the one who will represent the people”.

If you remember, there were three different areas of the tabernacle—the courtyard, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place. Whenever the High Priest was going to go into the Most Holy Place which was close to the place where God calls his glory to dwell—the mercy seat, the Ark of the Covenant—even when he was getting close to that, he was to wear this uniform because he couldn’t go in there on his own. He had to go as God had told him to. He would go in and he would represent the people. He would also have in that breast plate—in that pocket where it was folded over—the Urim and the Thummim. We are not sure exactly what they are, but we are told that is how the High Priest would inquire of the Lord what the Lord’s will was. He would go in there and bring to God the peoples’ questions. “What should we do? Should we go to war at this time,” David had the High Priest ask at times. He would go in, and on behalf of the people he would make use of the Urim and the Thummim—the means of decision—and then he would come back and bring the answer back to the people. He would represent God to the people.

Really all of this is there for us as a shadow and a picture of Christ. In the book of Hebrews, it applies this role of the priesthood—representation—as Jesus himself. It says in Hebrews 5,--*Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.* Jesus as our great High Priest came from among men. He was born of the Virgin Mary. He became one of us so that he could live under the law in our place—represent us. To do what you and I cannot do—which is be perfect. That is what God demands. Then he also represented the people by making a sacrifice for the people—the sacrifice of his own perfect life and his death on the cross—the agony of enduring hell in our place that you and I should deserve. That’s why he cries out, “*My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?*”

If you think about this, this is all **one-way work**. Jesus doesn’t bring his life and death to the table and we sit on the other side of a negotiating table and say, “Here is our

Christian life. We offer it to you God. Let's give on each side and we will see exactly what it is that is going to get us into heaven." God doesn't say to us, "I gave you 10 Commandments. You keep 7 out of 10 and I will let you into my heaven." That's not how it works. It's all one way. He demands perfection. Then what he demands, he gives to us. You and I as faithful Christians know this. We have this head knowledge of this and we rejoice in this, but are there times in our lives that we think we need to sit at a negotiating table with God and say, "God, I think you know me better. I deserve more. I've been dealt an unfair hand."

Within each of us because of our sinful nature there is this natural inclination that our efforts deserve something from someone. That if we work hard, we should be rewarded. We apply that at times to our Christian life. If we work hard and serve our God, God should reward us in some way, shape or form. If we take time out of our busy week to come and worship the Lord a second time during the week, on a Wednesday evening, then God must love us more than many people who do not take that time. Or if we take some of our hard earned money and give it to the church so that the lights are on and that Called Workers' salaries are paid, then God must owe us something because we are doing something for him. It should count for something.

We work so hard to raise our children and bring them up so they know who God is and what God has done, isn't there a part of us at some time that says, "God you should really reward me for this in some way, shape or form". When difficulty comes into our life and we look at someone else who could care less about God and they seem to have smooth sailing, don't we think that God is being a bit unfair? Don't we think he really owes us something?

I think that if we are honest with ourselves, we have got to admit that. Think about it. If someone came up to you and asked you, "Why does God love you?" Somewhere in your list of answers would you think, "Because I serve him. Because I try hard to do what is right before him. Because I try hard to honor him with everything that he has given me." If that enters into the equation whatsoever, we are trying to negotiate with God. We are trying to put what we have done on the table and say, "There God. Now what are you going to give me?" The fact of the matter is that we can't. If we want God to give us credit for what we have done, we are the one learning to cry out, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*, because we deserve the agony of hell.

This is why it is **one-way work**. Jesus lived perfectly in our place. Jesus died in our place. God through the work of the Holy Spirit brings all these blessings and pours them into our hearts until they are overflowing with his grace. This is what God has done for us as our great High Priest. He has represented us and lived and died in our place. As we go and we walk through our daily life, we do all those things. We serve the Lord with joy. We encourage one another. We bear with one another in love. We do all of these things, not so that God will owe us something, but because he has already given us heaven. We do it to thank him because he is our great High Priest.

Go back for a minute to that problem between you and a friend or you and or spouse. You can't get any contact with them. Who are you going to choose to be your representative, to represent you to go talk to them? If it is your spouse, are you going to

have one of their friends do it who always said, “You never should have married that guy, he is just a jerk anyhow”. Are you going to ask that person to go represent your interests? I don’t think so. You want someone who loves you, who is on your side and who wants to do right by you because you are important to them.

That’s who we have. We have one man who does the job for us and that is Jesus Christ. It’s not going to be just anyone. And even for the Old Testament High Priest, it wasn’t just anyone. God narrowed it down from the twelve tribes to one tribe. God narrowed it down from that one tribe to one clan. God narrowed it down from that clan to one family. Everyone from the time of Moses to the time of Christ’s ascension that was High Priest had to come from the family of Aaron.

When you look at those people that served as the great High Priest, remember what Aaron did? Even before they got to the Promise Land, even before they left Mt. Sinai where they got these instructions, what did Aaron do? When Moses stayed up on the mountain top a little too long remember he built that golden calf and said, “Here is the god that brought you out of Egypt”. Do you want him representing you to God? He didn’t exactly have everything lined up real well, did he?

When you think of guys like Eli who let his sons do things that were reprehensible and yet he served as High Priest. You look at the people of Jesus’ day. Some of those High Priests that used the position for political power and influence and yet God made use of them to serve as the High Priest. It’s pretty good insight into the nature of God’s grace that he uses those that are less than perfect. But in reality, every time the High Priest put on that uniform so to speak, he was reminded that he was a sinner. You wonder why he had to have bells on the bottom of his robe? It would make it hard to sneak a cookie in the middle of the night, wouldn’t it? He had to have bells on the bottom of his uniform so that when he came to the Holy Place, when he was getting close to God’s presence, it was there so that when he entered in or when he came out God would not strike him dead for a sinner daring to enter into the presence of God. It was a reminder that he was a sinner, but that God said, “Here’s how you can now come into my presence”—that God made him acceptable.

Did the bells have to be there so that it would catch God’s attention and God would be about to strike him down and go, “Oh yeah, those are the bells that I told him to wear”? Of course not, God knows everything. God knows that stuff. It’s for the Priest’s benefit, for the peoples’ benefit, so that they would know that you just can’t go running into God’s presence in your own way, how you see fit. It has to be how God sees fit.

He also had to have on that turban that he would wear on his head, a piece of gold, pure gold, flattened out that says, “Holy to the Lord” on it. And it says this would consecrate the gifts that he was bringing from the Israelites. What were those gifts again? What was that talking about? Did you catch that in the text? That would be all those sacrifices that we have been looking at week after week after week. It would be all that blood—the gold that was shining in what he was wearing and the gold that would glitter on the Day of Atonement when he walked into the Most Holy Place only to splatter blood all over it because blood has to be there to take away his sins and the sins of the people.

Those are all reminders that they were just a picture of the great High Priest to come because they couldn't do the job because they were sinners. We needed the sinless Son of God who would be perfect in our place so that he would give to us what God demands of us. God demands perfection and holiness. Through Jesus' perfect life he gives it to us, through his gift of faith.

Now we can enter into God's presence, but even more than that, more than entering into God's presence because we are covered with his perfection, you and I can leave from God's presence and take God's presence with us and we become the High Priest that represents God to other people who don't yet know him—those who are still walking around carrying the guilt of their wickedness and the evilness of their heart that they can see so clearly. They are walking with it weighing them down every day, and you and I have the answer. The answer is the blood of Christ—his perfect life—his innocent death. We get to represent God to the world.

For those of you who have ever been to our synod seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin, maybe you remember the chapel. If you have a really great memory, you might remember that the front stained glass window over the altar is Jesus dressed in the High Priest uniform. It's a wonderful reminder that our great High Priest is the one who is our go-between—who when you and I sin and we call out, "Lord forgive me", Jesus leans over to the Father and says, "I died for that sin". He intercedes for us. He is our go-between, and his blood makes us clean.