

Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 7:23-26; 8:1; 9:27-28
(Isaiah 53; John 1:29, 35-36)
“Priest”

Introduction

In the season of Advent, we remember the longing of God's Old Covenant people for the coming of the Messiah, the one who would satisfy the three basic requirements for our lives to have a lasting meaning and significance. First, we need to know who God is and what he expects of us. Second, we must find freedom from guilt and shame over our sin and brokenness. And, third, we need someone to guide us to our journey's end, and show us the way through death into unending life. In biblical language, we need a prophet to tell us the true story of life, a priest to atone for our sin and plead our case to the living God, and we need a king to lead us through life and death into eternal life.

Both the Hebrew word Messiah and the Greek word Christ mean the Anointed One. The three offices in Israel that required that one be anointed with oil were that of prophet, priest and king. On the first Sunday in Advent, we saw that God is not silent, as some charge him with being. The problem, rather, is that we are spiritually deaf. God has been speaking all throughout history, at all times and places, through his creation, through our consciences that tell us what is right and wrong, through his messengers who proclaim his word, and finally, supremely, through his Son, who came as the promised Prophet, showing us both who God is, and who God intends for us to be. As prophet, Jesus Christ answered our need to know who God is, and what he requires of us. This morning, we will look at the way he meets our second great need, to be free from bondage to sin, guilt and shame. In our text, we will see that Jesus accomplishes the three crucial tasks of a priest: a priest must offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people, thus dealing with their past; he must speak to God on behalf of the people, thus enabling them to move forward in the present; and he must bless the people, offering them hope for the future.

Body

1. Since we have such a great high priest, we can face the past free from guilt and shame, because Jesus has dealt once and for all with our past by making purification for sins (1:3).
2. Since we have such a great high priest, we can face the present moment with confidence, because Jesus in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin and so we may with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (4:5&16). And we are never alone in our intercession, for he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them (7:25).
3. Since we have such a great high priest, we can face the future with hope, because Jesus having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (9:28).

Conclusion

Remarkably, those who have received such grace are called to a new life in Christ, a new life in which we ourselves are called priests: You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5). Jesus has entrusted this ministry to us as well, and as priests like him we are called to give ourselves in self-sacrificing love, to intercede for God's people and for this broken world, and to bless it by living as salt and light, and by pointing the way to everlasting life.

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