

## Hebrews 5:1-10

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

Nothing shapes my preaching and teaching as much as that stained glass window that I face each time I come into the pulpit. It sits on the back wall our gathering space which is to say to the backs of everyone in the gathered assembly, but right in my face as I stand at the pulpit. I might ignore it from time to time, but it is always there.

It is a depiction of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus at his most human moment, and yet, ironically, it is Jesus as the high priest who prays with reverent submission—not my will but

thine be done—not only for his own bitter cup to pass away, but for all our bitter cups—all our sufferings and desperations.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is divided up into two parts. The first is the “teachings, healings and preaching” of Jesus. Most of that took place in Galilee and always occupies the first half of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke [the “Synoptic Gospels”].

Preaching, teaching and healing. Mark 1 to 10 for example has Jesus teaching and preaching and healing in Galilee. At Mark 10, Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem.

But the second half of the Gospel is “the Life, death and resurrection” of Jesus. And most of that takes place in the second half of the gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke.

as Methodist scholar and bishop, William Willimon puts it “In the teaching healing and preaching, life death and resurrection of Jesus, we get to see all of God that we need to see.” It is the “whole” Gospel.

But this morning, *it* is all about this second half.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

In a certain sense, of course, he wasn’t heard at all. Or at least his prayer wasn’t answered in the sense we usually like to see prayers answered.

“This bitter cup, let it pass from me.”

It is, as I’ve said many times, the epitome of unanswered prayer.

So, dear Jesus seems to know this and says immediately, “Not my will but thine be done.”

He was heard of course. Because of his submission to his Father’s will.

Philippians 2:8-11

And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and

under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, Gethsemane is the turning point in the career of Jesus the high priest. At that moment he becomes the one and only high priest who understands entirely the depths of our suffering and the only anchor of our hope.

Jesus offers up prayers and supplications (supplications means the heartfelt requests of God to supply our needs), he offers up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears. And he was heard because of his reverent submission.

---

Submission is never an easy thing and I rarely do it willingly.

Jesus enacts his submission by washing the disciples' feet on the night of Jesus' betrayal.

Luckily submission rarely comes willingly. Submission to pain and suffering just happens. And it is not the will of God that I or anyone else suffer.

Not the will of God.

Suffering just happens.

Sometimes the suffering is extreme, but most of the time suffering for the sake of the Gospel is mundane and ordinary. At our offices, some courageous folks decide that doing the right thing is found not to be in the interest of the company for which we work. And but they sometimes do the right thing anyway and lose a promotion.

When we move through the world making day to day decisions, we sometimes come up against what the Gospel of Jesus has taught us to be true and right and what the company we work for insists that we do. There are these little compromises that each of us must make in order to keep the paychecks coming. But there comes a time when the compromises can no longer be made and a decision is required.

When it comes time for a promotion—or worse a time when the corporation's hierarchy must decide who gets laid off—the ones who have made the right Gospel decision may suffer the loss of a job. And the reasons for the loss of that job are lost in the obscurity of the series of events that are not clear enough to bring to legal action. So one leaves quietly and accepts that the

world is ordered in a way that is not in alignment with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

God wants only one thing of us all.

God wants us to live a full life that is truly human and truly in keeping with our understanding of the Gospel. And like Jesus, there will be moments that bring suffering and despair.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

God does not will us to suffer and despair, but it is inevitable in a world that is organized against the Gospel, the teaching, healing and preaching, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

And we will on one level or another find ourselves in the Garden of Gethsemane.

- When we tell our friends at school to stop bullying someone whom we barely know, we risk losing that friend.
- When we make it clear that we really do not want to hear racist jokes, we risk losing friends who like to tell them.
- When we report that the folks in our neighborhood are trafficking in drugs and we want the police to investigate, we risk having windows broken or worse.

Living the life of the Gospel has real costs. But it is not a cost with no return. What is at stake is our whole salvation and in the course of things, we gain an intimacy with God in Christ who accompanies us through our suffering at the hands of injustice.

The story is told of a woman named Marita in El Salvador whose husband was a union organizer. One day the army came and took her husband away and raped Marita and her teenaged daughter and left them for dead.

The daughter did in fact, die.

Then some days later, there came an early morning knock at the door of Marita's house and she got out of bed and found a box containing part of the body of her husband.

She and the village priest and some friends buried the box.

Then the next day another box came. And the next day another. And the next day another.

She finally moved from El Salvador to Costa Rica after the boxes stopped coming.

The woman who met Marita asked her how she could bear such a horror and Marita said, "Well the first day I just threw up next to my bed. But then I began to expect the knock on the door and the boxes and I would get out of bed and stand there waiting for the knock. It was the most amazing thing. "As I walked it was as if I could feel Jesus' arms around me, cradling my head against his wounded side. And every morning as I made that little journey from my bed to the door, I prayed, "Thank you Lord Jesus, for allowing me to share your cross with you."".<sup>i</sup>

God does not will persecution and pain for God's people. It is not something that happens "for our own good."

But suffering always accompanies a courageous faith and it is in the powerful plan of a loving God who will redeem our suffering and make all things right.<sup>ii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> See Reverend Eugenia Gamble for this story: [http://day1.org/825-suffering\\_for\\_faith](http://day1.org/825-suffering_for_faith)

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid.