

The Fifth Sunday in Lent - Year B  
March 29, 2009  
The Reverend Robert P. Travis

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## “Sir, We Wish To See Jesus”

Jeremiah 31:31-34, Psalm 51:1-13, Hebrews 5:5-10, John 12:20-33

*(Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.)*

My first rector as an adult, after I graduated from college, lead me into ministry. Rather, he persuaded me, over my objections to give ministry a try. He had a sense of the priesthood of all believers, and wanted me to engage in mine, even before I got the call to ordained ministry. As you can see today, he saw something in me that I did not see myself, but I am grateful that he refused to let me say no, to my calling.

He drove this big old green car around town, it was an elegant car that he bought used, it was about 10 years old and I think it was an Infinity. He had a personalized license plate, that I couldn't make sense of. It said M-L-K-Z-D-K.

One day when I saw him getting out of his car, he said, “did you see my license plate? I thought you of all people around here would appreciate that.” He thought I knew more about the bible than I did. As often is the case with me, when people expect me to know something, his high expectations fed into my tendency to pretend I know what I am supposed to know. I said, “yeah. I get it.” When I should have said, “no, that makes no sense to me, what does it mean?”

Eventually I figured out that those letters spelled out Melchizedek, but it took me a while before I found out who Melchizedek was, or why an Episcopal Priest would want his name for a vanity plate on his car.

In Hebrews today we hear twice that Jesus is a priest “according to the order of Melchizedek.” The author of Hebrews also thinks Melchizedek is significant enough to use him in helping explain the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you look it up, you’ll find that Melchizedek was the first priest mentioned in the Bible, and an interesting one at that, for he is a priest of God Most High, before the Aaronic priesthood was established in the Sinai. At the very beginning of the story of God's chosen people in Abraham.

After Abraham first defeats his enemies with the support of the Lord, Melchizedek, who was king of Salem as well as priest of God Most High, comes out with bread and wine and blesses Abraham by God Most High.

His blessing is not simply a foretaste of the priesthood that God establishes, but also of the Eucharistic meal which Jesus establishes with his disciples. Abraham's response to the blessing of God is to give Melchizedek a tenth of everything that he has.

It is interesting to me that Abraham's response was to tithe, before it was asked for or required by God. But the purpose of this sermon is not to tell you that you need to tithe to the priests who bless you (though that is always a good idea). There is something significant that Abraham, who was already blessed by God, needed an intermediary to reassure him of God's blessing.

This brings us to the reading from the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah speaks the word of God, describing before Jesus was born, how God will make a new covenant between Himself and His people.

The old covenant required priests who would come between God and his people. These were actually the people's idea, not God's. If you remember in Exodus, Moses and the people encounter God at Mount Sinai. But the presence of God scares the people too much. And they beg God to send someone to represent them, because they can't stand to be in his holy presence, without someone between them. They chose Moses to go before them to be an intermediary and then God establishes His priesthood through Moses' brother Aaron.

Ever afterwards, the high priest would be the only one who would go into the holy of holies, in the temple, and approach the presence of God to offer sacrifice on the day of atonement.

But through Jeremiah, God is telling us that He planned to make a new covenant with His people, in which the intermediaries will not be necessary. He says, I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

That is what God did through Jesus, who became our Great High Priest. According to the order of Melchizedek. Jesus died for us, and is present in the hearts of all believers, so that we do not need another human, to go to God on our behalf. We have communion with God, through the Blood of the New Covenant.

You may remember that phrase, because we recall it each time we celebrate the Eucharist that Jesus said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant." This new covenant He was talking about is the same as the new covenant God was speaking through Jeremiah. And it is enacted through the blood of Jesus. But the Gospel reading today tells us how we still need intermediaries and how we are a part of the priesthood of all believers.

I had another friend, a friend in Seminary who had a sign on his car I couldn't make out at

first. It was a bumper sticker this time, and it said: H-S-C-M-N-G-B-C-K – Tell A Friend  
Do you understand it? It took me about a year, of seeing his car in the parking lot, before I sounded it out and figured out what it meant.

H-S-C-M-N-G-B-C-K – Tell a Friend

Means, “He's coming back, tell a friend.”

We still need intermediaries but not in the same sense, of the old covenant priesthood. The Gospel today shows us how we need people to bring us to Jesus. Among those who went to Jerusalem to the festival were some Greeks. These were not Greek-speaking Jews, they were gentiles. And they went to Philip who was from Bethsaida in Galilee because gentiles were living there, and because Philip had a greek name, and he was known to be a disciple of Jesus. So they figured that He would be able to bring them to Jesus.

“Sir,” they said, “we wish to see Jesus.”

*---further explanation – of the answer of Jesus, which doesn't seem to make sense.---*

This is what we still need intermediaries for, when your friends, or even people who just know you by reputation, come to you. You can bring them to Jesus as well. They will come to you because they know you are a Christian, at least they know you go to church. And hopefully they see a hope and joy in you that marks you, of your baptism as Christ's own forever. And because of your baptism, you are a part of the priesthood of all believers. You are one of those who has a responsibility, to bring others to Jesus.

When they come to you and say, “Sir, Ma'am, we wish to see Jesus.” Or more likely, they will say, why do you go to church so much? - or - What do you get out of your participation at Ascension? - or even - What is it about Jesus that you like?

Be, prepared, as Paul wrote to the Romans, to give an account for the Hope that is in you. Perhaps you, like Philip need help, he went to Andrew, who was his partner in many ways, as a disciple of Jesus, and together they went to Jesus.

The clergy and staff of Ascension, as well as your friends who are fellow ministers with us here, are happy to be Andrew for you, to go with you as you lead these people to Jesus.

As you take communion today, as you bring the blood of the New Covenant to your lips, recognize the priesthood of all believers that you are a part of, and rejoice that Jesus lives in your heart, waiting to be introduced, to those around you. “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” they will say to you, and like my friend's license plate and bumper sticker the signs will have been indecipherable for them, until you give them the explanation.

“He's coming back – Tell a friend.”