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Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The High Priest Mediates God's Relationship with His People

Hebrews 5:1-10

INI

Grace and peace from God and from our High Priest who mediates this word of God from heaven to earth for you. Amen.

Hebrews 5:1–10

For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. ³ Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer *sacrifices* for sins. ⁴ And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron *was*.

⁵ So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, *but it* was He who said to Him:

*"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You."*

⁶ As He also says in another place:

*"You are a priest forever
According to the order of Melchizedek";*

⁷ who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, ¹⁰ called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

This Word of the Lord is spoken for you.

The High Priest Mediates God's Relationship with His People

1. Aaron Mediated God's Relationship with the Children of Israel
2. Melchizedek Mediated God's Relationship with Abraham
3. Jesus Mediates God's Eternal Relationship with All Who Submit to God Through Him

After years of debate over property rights, a corporation hires a lawyer to settle disputes with a competitor. After years of conflict with an eastern country, a president sends a diplomat to negotiate peace talks. After years of a strained marriage, a couple goes to see a counselor. After years of distant relations, a congregation sends the elders to visit a member.

Differing interests; conflicted diplomacy; strained marriages; distant church relations. The role of a mediator is to stand between two conflicted parties and foster a mutually agreeable resolution. This most often happens when a relationship is in discord. The two parties just cannot come to an peaceful agreement on their own and they need a third party to negotiate a settlement. They need a mediator.

The role of the High Priest is to mediate a relationship. Differing interests; conflict; strained relations; a people and a God who have grown apart; which ever way you look at it, we just cannot come to a peaceful agreement with God on our own. The role of the High Priest is to foster this agreement. And so God calls a mediator negotiate a relationship between Himself and His people.

Today we'll look at three examples of this taking place – firstly, when the High Priest Aaron mediated God's relationship with the Children of Israel under the Old Covenant; secondly, when Melchizedek mediated God's Covenant with Abraham in Genesis chapter 14; and finally, we'll look at how both these examples foreshadow and find fulfillment in the Great High Priest of our confession, Jesus Christ – who mediates God's eternal covenant with all who submit to God through Him.

Let us pray, O Lord, send now your Holy Spirit to mediate the heavenly blessings of forgiveness and knowledge through the proclamation of the new covenant in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1. Aaron Mediated God's Relationship with the Children of Israel

The people of Israel needed a mediator in any number of ways. When you look at the history of Israel in the Old Testament you understand why God instituted the priesthood. The people needed a mediator; and Aaron would be the first.

There were debates over rights, divergent interests about what belongs to the people and what belongs to God. There were conflicts with other countries, conflicts that the people thought they could settle on their own; with their own negotiations were siding with nations that opposed the LORD Most High. Scripture often pictured this relationship as a strained marriage. Again and again Israel committed adultery against

God who redeemed them and they went after other gods. It was a relationship that grew distant. Their sins separated them from their God. And to try to gain direct access to God's presence in such a state meant death. The only way they could draw close to God was through a Mediator.

1 For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.

So from among the weakness of the the people God called him; the first high priest: Aaron; a man surrounded by His own sins and weaknesses; a man who needed to offer sacrifices for his own sins and then for the people. Only one man, from among all twelve tribes of Israel, would be granted to walk on that sacred ground, to handle that sacred blood, and there behind the great veil in the tabernacle, God would meet with His people. It as a ceremony marked by blood and sacrifice; and there through the priest, God would grant forgiveness to His holy people. Aaron was the first high priest to stand between God and the people and mediate peace.

2. Melchizedek Mediated God's Relationship with Abraham

But he was not really the first. Before Aaron there was another. Centuries earlier, there was a man, of his own tribe, of his own lineage, of his own order – a mysterious figure who appears for just three verses of Genesis chapter fourteen and then he is gone. His name: Melchizedek, the priest of Salem. He comes from Salam, the village whose name means "peace" and in bread and wine he negotiates God's peace with Abraham

He greets Abraham with bread and wine and a blessing. Abraham has just returned from a fierce conflict with four kings who had plundered Sodom. Tired, weak, surrounded by enemies, he returns and is greeted by Melchizedek.

Abraham was returning from a rescue mission. His nephew, Lot had wandered off. Out of all the land that God had offered to him, Lot had chosen to live in Sodom – the city known above all others for its wickedness. But Lot saw only the beauty of the land; well watered, fruitful, well populated – he saw only the beauty and ignored its ugliness. So Lot had grown distant in his relationship with God Most High – lost in ignorance and going astray. And now, after a raid from four kings to the north, Lot was taken captive by his enemies.

In a valiant rescue mission, Abraham set out with his servants; he approached their camp in the cover of night; he took them by surprise, overthrew them, and saved his nephew Lot. He returns from battle, tired, weak, surrounded by enemies; and there he

is greeted with bread and wine and a blessing. It is the priest of God Most High, Melchizedek. From the village called “peace,” he comes with bread and wine and stands between God and Abraham to mediate this blessing: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”

Melchizedek Mediated God’s Relationship with Abraham.

3. Jesus Mediates God’s Eternal Relationship with All Who Submit to God Through Him

But the priesthood was never really about Aaron or Melchizedek. It was all a picture of something greater. Scripture has but one goal in all that it speaks; and that is to bring us to Christ. God’s Word is always aiming to bring us to Christ where we find the fulfillment of all that Aaron did; and all that Melchizedek pictured. Here we find the goal of the priesthood and of our salvation: Jesus, the High Priest who mediates God’s eternal relationship with all who submit to God through him.

But who will submit? Who will back down? In any divisive, conflicted, strained, or distant relationship – in order to find peace, someone needs to back down; admit their fault; and be willing to give something up. And the temptation is to think it is up to us to negotiate this relationship, to bring our case before God, to offer a settlement. And we make the mistake of trying to go directly to God with our works, as if there is something we can offer God to bring about a peaceful resolution.

We debate about rights – what belongs to God and what belongs to us. We try to settle conflict with our enemies on our own – digging our heels in, devising plans of revenge. We live in a strained relationship and marriages – thinking somehow this will fix itself without God’s help or the need for me to back down in repentance. We grow more and more distant from God; from our church; from other Christians – and we spend time imagining how its not my fault; how my sins can be excused, but their’s can’t.

So we bring our case before God trying desperately to show why we deserve better. We argue with God as to why we should not have to suffer; why loss or pain or hell is not someone else, not me. And even though we know that the one who has ultimately been wronged is not us, but God, we just can’t admit it; or we think we can fix it. Someone needs to back down, and it certainly won’t be me.

For this reason God instituted the office of High Priest. Because we couldn’t offer a peaceful resolution by our own works or resolutions. Someone needs to back down,

someone to offer a resolution, someone to satisfy the God who has been wronged. And it won't be us, so instead, God has decided to do it himself – to back down, to offer a resolution, to satisfy himself for our offenses.

5 So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You."

Like Aaron, Jesus was called by God from among men to mediate a sacrifice; to offer a ransom on behalf of the people. Jesus became the Son that we have failed to be, the people that we have failed to be, the servant that the Maker of heaven and earth deserves among His creatures. For the Son of Man has been called by God to serve and to give His life as a ransom.

In tears and cries and prayers, Jesus came surrounded by weakness. And so He says to us, "Who ever desires to be first shall be slave of all. So I shall be your slave. I give up all of My rights to divine Sonship, that that I might earn them back as a Son in your place and on Your behalf. I will be surrounded by weakness, as you yourself know, and yet in ways that you will never know. Never once will I place myself first or use my powers to accomplish this. The devil will be at hand, and I must let him. They will shackle me, falsely accuse me, place me among sinners, and I will let them. I will say, yes. This is God's will. This is what My Father has asked. This is my death. And in the utter agony of hell, I Myself stand between God and you; the sacrifice for sin. In one final breath, I will cry out to God in a prayer and having satisfied all, I give my spirit to Him."

And He was heard because of His godly fear. And God heard His prayers, His cries, His sacrifice. "You are My Son and today I raise You up from death according to the order of Melchizedek." This mysterious priest, who appears for a time and is gone, but rises from death and lives forever. He places Himself between us and God in a new relationship; a new covenant. One which is not subject to death; one which does not need to continually offer more and more sacrifices – an order that will continue forever and will mediate a sacrifice, once for all.

So the psalmist writes in Psalm 110, "1 The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool. ... 4 The Lord has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:1,4).

Jesus comes according to the order of Melchizedek. He is the priest who comes from a city called peace. And here he finds us – lost, led astray by the beauties of this world, ignoring its ugliness; here he finds us and rescues us from the hands of our enemies.

Here he greets us – tired, weak, surrounded by enemies; here he comes, from a city called peace, and greets us with bread and wine and blessing. In a new covenant, not according to the first which was broken and which fostered hostility; but according to the power of an endless life; He mediates a relationship in His own blood; the blood of the new covenant, where we all shall know Him, where He forgives our iniquities and our lawless deeds he remembers no more. Here Jesus comes in a new order, from a city called peace, he greets us in body and blood and a blessing: “Blessed be you who submit to God Most High in Me; and blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hand.”

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, 10 called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”

As you leave today, you will likely be running into difficult relationships – relationships you’ve been in for years even – business relationships where you find differing interests; social and racial relationships that seem to always produce conflicts; marriage relationships that have been strained to the point of breaking; a relationship with your church that has grown distant.

As you return to these relationships and find yourself caught in tough conversations where the two parties just can’t seem to see eye to eye, remember this: Jesus is Your High Priest, who mediates the blessing of Melchizedek in your relationship. See yourself having a conversation under the cross.

It was in a recent phone conversation in my office that I saw myself under the cross. It was one of those tough conversations, where a pastor finds he doesn’t know what to say. As the conversation progressed; I realized I don’t have all the answers; there are conflicts that I just couldn’t fix. As I realized the weaknesses that surround me, I suddenly saw myself under the cross. As I looked down at the cell phone on my desk, I saw in my cell phone, a reflection of the cross. The cross which hangs on my wall above my computer, which is always there, but which I pay no attention to, was suddenly there – standing above my conversation, standing between me and those to whom I am called to minister, mediating all that we do as a fellowship through the sacrifice of Christ – the one who sympathizes with our weaknesses.

See yourself having a conversation under the cross. See that cross, which stands between you and God; which stands between you and the people you love; which stands between you and the people you have trouble loving. For as Jesus said, among the Gentiles, their masters exercise authority over them; but it shall not be so among you – whoever desires to be great, shall be slave of all. There in your reflection on the

cross, in your tears and cries and prayers, you have a High Priest who sympathizes with your weaknesses, and is constantly mediating your relationship with God; In the cross of Jesus, you will find peace; "For he is the author of eternal salvation for all who submit to God through Him." Amen.