

Being the Church at Brentwood

Once and For All

**Ps 34:1-8 & Hebrews 7:23-28
(645, 18, 814, 358)**

October 28, 2012

When human beings become distressed and discouraged,
they often look for someone to help them.

Either that, or they withdraw into ourselves
and suffer various degrees of depression.

What is required to turn people around,
to help them see life differently,
is a revival of hope and resilience,
a fresh sense of possibility and endurance.

Remember, Hebrews is a sermon
written for a congregation that was under stress and strain.
The preacher encourages his listeners and readers
to remember that their hopes lie in Jesus Christ
and Jesus Christ alone.

In Jesus Christ, God assures us
that he has done everything necessary
to bless human beings by restoring their original glory
as friends with and stewards of God.

Our core health and vitality,
our full flourishing,
is found in an intimate relationship with God –
the source of our being as Father,
the redeemer of our being as Son,
and the sustainer of our being as Spirit.
This is the divine community into which we are welcomed
by the priestly work of Jesus Christ.

Once and for all,
one time only and for all people,
Jesus Christ made the sacrifice necessary
to satisfy God's just requirement that we pay for our sinfulness,
for our distorted drive to control everything.

It's the once and for all quality
of what God did for humanity in Jesus Christ
that I want to draw particular attention to this morning.
The core message of the sermon is that God's grace,
offered by and seen most clearly in Jesus Christ,
is now with all human beings everywhere.

God's desire is to be with and enjoy the company of human beings,
enabling them to dance and work with
the divine community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
to bless the creation.

That is what it means to flourish in the faith.
That is the quality of life that the Spirit nourishes.
That is what the priestly work of Jesus Christ
enables human beings to do with their energy.

All of the priestly language that fills this part Hebrews
points to this reality and truth.
God did for us in Jesus Christ
what we could not and cannot do for ourselves.
God have us access to the life-giving company
of the holy community of the Trinity.
God invited us once and for all
into the full flourishing and joy of the divine dance.

There is no comparison in terms of power and effectiveness
between the old Jewish traditions of the priesthood
and the new covenant Jesus Christ established and maintains
as the final and ultimate prophet, priest, and king,
as the one who fulfills the Father's desire for reconciliation
once, and only once, and for all peoples, *all* peoples.

The power of the priest in the Jewish tradition
was to offer daily the sacrifices necessary to satisfy God
and to represent the will of God to the people.
The priest was the go-between.
He represented humans to God and God to humans.
In many ways, he was seen to control access to God.

That control brought with it great power.
When such control is put into human hands,
into hands that are imperfect and suffer from a desire to control completely,
then abuse of such power is probable, if not certain.

This abuse lies at the heart of Jesus' critique
of the priestly control of access to God during his earthly life.
The readers of and listeners to this sermon
would remember well Jesus' encounters
with the whole system of political and economic exploitation
that had grown up around the temple priests and their sacrifices in his day.

Fifty years or so after the ultimate sacrifice had been made
once and for all on the cross,
after the power of the priests had attempted to rid the earth of this upstart,
the preacher in Hebrews reminds these early Christians and us
that the benefits of God's grace now flow freely to all human beings
through the crucifixion, resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Because of the power of this act of God,
done once, and for all human beings,
there is no need to remain distressed, discouraged, and depressed.
In Jesus Christ, we gain direct and permanent access
to the source of the richest and most fulfilling life we can imagine,
indeed, to a flourishing of life that is beyond anything
we can imagine and hope for (Eph 3:20).

That is the preacher's message to this congregation
that is struggling to thrive faithfully
in the midst of dissent, dismissal, and indifference.
And it is the same message to similar congregations today.

Remember what Jesus Christ has done for you
and for all humanity.

He has restored you to God's favour.

He has revived your energy to serve God.

He has redeemed you from the blind ambition to control everything.

He has reconciled you to the community that dances around in delight
imagining possibilities for how the whole creation can flourish.

And he has done this *once* and for all.
He has done this once *for all*.