

Sermon July 28, 2019
Pastor Douglas Larson

Hebrews 4:10-5:10

First Lutheran Church, Aitkin

Dear Friends in Christ, grace to and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen

What does God look like to you? No, not in hair color, or eyes or skin or clothes. But what does the essence of Jesus look like to you? What does the inner person of Jesus look like?

I was sitting with a woman whose husband had died six weeks earlier. We were sitting in her kitchen and in the course of our conversation she said, "I don't remember what my husband looked like. Is that strange? I said I don't think so and I think I know what you are talking about. I told her that sometime earlier my wife had gone on a three week trip to Germany with her sister. When Barbara got back into Minneapolis she called us. We talked and then she asked to talk to the children. When our five year old son got on the line he didn't say much. Barbara then asked, "Do you remember me?" He said, "Oh yes I remember you but I don't know what your head looks like."

He was saying that he had an inner picture of his mother but the actual physical face wasn't clear. I have come to believe that we form inner pictures of people that are more important than the physical reality. As we go about our daily life we see the person with the inner or essence of who they are. I think this wife had an inner picture of her husband and the actual face was secondary.

So what does Jesus look like to you? What is that inner picture you have? Is it one that is stern and scolding? Is it one that is wishy-washy and namby-pamby? These are two extremes and I hope neither is where you are. But for some, that is their picture of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews seeks to give us a picture of Jesus that is helpful to our life and faith. They base it upon the High Priest in the Jewish religion. The High Priest was to help facilitate the person's relationship to God. They were in charge of things pertaining to God. They provided worship, offered prayer for people and offered sacrifices for thanksgiving and for the atonement or forgiveness of sins. The High Priest and other priests were to help people experience God and receive mercy and find grace.

The writer tells us that the High Priest was chosen by others. He didn't get it by asking for it. He would also go through the heavy curtain into the Holy of Holies once a year to offer a new loaf of bread in thanksgiving and make a sacrifice of atonement for all people. He also, because he was a human himself, could understand and sympathize with people in their sin.

But there was a story in the Reader's Digest in the Humor in Uniform section that occurred in Vietnam. Roman Catholic Chaplains had set up two tents to hear confessions. There were 15 to twenty soldiers lined up in front of each. Suddenly from one tent was heard, "You did what?!" A soldier rushed out and ran from the area. Slowly all the soldiers in front of that tent moved into the other line. Sometimes the priests were not so understanding.

The Hebrews writer tells us that Jesus was chosen by God at his Baptism and made a priest after the order of Melchizedek, a mysterious priest that blesses Abraham in the Genesis. We are told that Jesus went not through the curtain in the temple but through the heavens to God's glory, offering himself for us as the atonement sacrifice. Jesus told his disciples that his body and blood were the offering for us. So we see a new High Priest in Jesus.

So on the basis of this passage, what does Jesus look like to you? Is he the High Priest that goes to bat for you? The one who throws himself on a grenade for you? The one who takes bread and wine and says this is given and shed "for you"? Is Jesus the one who gives himself up for us, even when he wanted that cup of suffering to pass by as stated in the Gospel lesson from Matthew? Is Jesus the one who loved us so much that he wanted the best for us even more than he wanted it for himself? Is he the one who says , as is said in a spiritual weekend, "You're worth it."?

The Hebrews writer tells us that Jesus as our High Priest made himself the sacrifice for our sin once and for all. He doesn't offer himself again and again, once on the cross was sufficient. Here is a difference we have with out Roman Catholic brothers and sisters: Jesus is offered again and again to God for our sins. Offering Mass is the term used to say we offer Jesus, his body and blood, his mass to God. For that reason, Jesus is on the cross in Roman Catholic churches. As Lutherans, Jesus is not on the cross to be offered again and again. His once in time death and resurrection provides forgiveness into eternity. We are called to draw upon this forgiveness every time we confess our sins and ask for mercy and grace.

In Gethsemane Jesus prayed to be delivered from his suffering, crucifixion and death. But then he said, "Not my will be done but yours, Father." Jesus is the High Priest that says all he did was for us, for our salvation.

So what does Jesus look like to you?