

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Good Friday
April 7, 2023
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Our great high priest

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, let us continue to hold on to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. ¹⁶So let us approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

⁷In the days of his flesh, he offered prayers and pleas with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸Although he was the Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. ⁹After he was brought to his goal, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.

—Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9

Exhausted, wet, covered in mud and sweat, we stood at the bottom of “the Bender.” There was a great divide in front of us. We were several miles into this obstacle course. I knew that there was no way that I would be able to get over this one on my own. The first rung to get on this giant ladder was about seven feet off the ground. I wouldn’t be able to do it. I was too weak. I was too tired.

A couple of months ago I did a Spartan 10k Obstacle course run. As we did this course, there were obstacles that seemed too great a divide for me. I needed help. I couldn’t do it on my own. The obstacle that I referenced, I was able to cross because of the assistance of those who hoisted me up to the first rung. On my own, the divide would have been impossible.

The divide between fallen humans and God is greater than this. The divide between sinful humanity and God is uncrossable. They couldn’t reach God on their own. They couldn’t hoist each other up to reach God. The divide was too great. A greater solution was needed. Today, on Good Friday, as we look upon Christ on the cross. We see the depths of the divide. We see what was needed to cross it; the cross. There on the cross we see the solution. There on the cross we see **our Great High Priest**.

We do not always understand how unreachable God is to sinful humanity. They cannot reach out to grab him. They cannot jump to where he is. We may gain a greater understanding of how unreachable God is by considering the Old Testament ceremonial concept of holiness.

God is holy. This does not just mean that he is perfect. This does not just mean that he does what is right. God is holy in that he is completely separated from sin. Sinful beings cannot just come into the presence of God. In the Old Testament era, this was illustrated by the fact that the people needed to be ceremonially clean to enter the temple. Even upon entering the temple, not everyone could go everywhere. God is holy. Sinful people could not come into his presence. The divide between sinful people and God was too great.

The people of Israel needed an intercessor. They needed someone who could go between them and God. There was a representative of the people who could come near God in the portion of the temple called the Holy of Holies or the Most Holy Place. He had to purify himself, make sacrifices, and wear sacred garments. This is all laid out in Leviticus 16 regarding the day of Atonement. Others could not be with him. As is written later in Hebrews, “*But only the high priest would enter the second section of the tent, once each year, and not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people committed in ignorance.*” (Hebrews 9:7) This communicated many things. Yet, the existence of the Holy of Holies and the rules that only one person once a year could enter it demonstrated the inaccessibility of God to sinful people. They needed their high priest.

In this lesson today, we see that Jesus is **Our Great High Priest**. The functions of the high priest pointed forward to what Jesus would do. Jesus did it in the greater way. Jesus worked to bring fallen humanity near God. He came to cross the divide. Let’s consider what this text says regarding **Our Great High Priest**.

Jesus is **our Great High Priest**. First, what is Jesus’ function as priest? The priests of Israel made sacrifices for people. The priests of Israel also interceded for the people in prayer. This is what Jesus did. Jesus gave the greatest sacrifice. He sacrificed himself, the unblemished lamb. He made the sacrifice on the cross. The blood that he shed on the cross also testifies for the people for whom he was sacrificed. Those who are covered in the blood of the lamb are washed clean. They can be confident of their standing before the Holy God.

Blood needed to be shed. Thousands and thousands of sacrifices were made. Over and over again, animals were slaughtered. This was to testify to the seriousness of sin. The punishment of sin is death. Only blood could atone for sin. Jesus, **Our Great High Priest** made the greatest sacrifice, himself.

Our Great High Priest passed through the heavens. The previous high priests could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year. Yet, Jesus descended from heaven. Then, after his work was complete, he ascended back to heaven. There he lives and rules eternally.

Jesus is **Our Great High Priest**, yet he is no regular man. Jesus is the Son of God. Although he is far greater than us in that way, he can sympathize with our weakness. He lived in our place. As our substitute, **Our Great High Priest** was tempted in every single way, but he did not sin. He knew temptation, but he defeated it. Therefore, **Our Great High Priest**, unlike the other priests, did not need to make a sacrifice for himself and for his sins. His sacrifice was for others. His sacrifice was for everyone else. **Our Great High Priest** is holy. He alone could be the unblemished lamb.

Our Great High Priest offered himself as the unblemished sacrifice. He, the sinless, perfect man, died on the cross of Calvary. He shed his blood. Therefore, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence. In him, we have mercy. In him, we have grace. Because of Our Great High Priest, the divide is not great. He has brought us near to God. Now, we can approach the throne.

Brothers and sisters, today, we witness the sacrifice given by **Our Great High Priest**. God took flesh. He lived perfectly in our place. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he offered prayers and pleas to God. He prayed that this cup of suffering be taken from him. Yet, he consented to what he must do. He went forward willingly and without complaint. His prayers in the Garden were answered, the Father sent an angel to strengthen him. Then he went forward to make the sacrifice at Golgotha.

The Son of God was obedient. Although he was the Son, he learned obedience experientially in suffering. In obedience, he experienced mockery. Mocked by the soldiers. In obedience, he experienced torture. Flogged, whipped, and beaten. In obedience, he suffered the pain of hell. He was forsaken by the Father. **Our Great High Priest** did all this in obedience because this is what was needed. This is what we needed. Sin deserves death. God is just. Sin does not go unpunished. The sacrifice for sinners needed to be perfect. Only the death of God could forgive the sin of all. **Our Great High Priest** willingly made this necessary sacrifice.

The end result of **Our Great High Priest's** sacrifice was clear. The curtain that divided God and people was torn in half when he proclaimed, "It is finished!" and died. Through his sacrifice, **Our Great High Priest** brought us near to God. He is the source of eternal salvation. All who obey him, which is all who have the obedience of faith, all who look to **Our Great High Priest**, Jesus Christ, have eternal salvation. Their sins are forgiven. They will live with God forever in paradise.

People of Emmanuel, let's look at the cross. See the body. That is the perfect sacrifice. That is the Son of God. That is the source of your salvation. That is **Our Great High Priest**. You know that the sacrifice worked because three days later he rose from the grave. You are justified.

There was a great chasm. People stood at the edge of the cliff. There was no way to jump across. There was no way to go down to the bottom of the chasm to walk. There were no supplies to use to build a bridge. There they stood. There was an uncrossable chasm. No way across. They were stuck.

They could not cross until the cross was the bridge. Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary is what made the people cross the uncrossable chasm between God and sinful humanity. This is the work of **Our Great High Priest**.

If you are here today, listen to my words. Jesus is **Your Great High Priest**. All that Jesus did is for you. The Son of God took flesh to live in your place. Jesus Christ faced every temptation that you face and overcame them. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. Jesus was mocked for you. Jesus suffered for you. Jesus did all this because of your sins. Jesus did all this because of his love for you. Jesus shed his blood on the cross for you. In a few days we will celebrate that Jesus was raised to life for your justification. Jesus is **Your Great High Priest**.

Therefore, since you have a high priest, who has gone through the heavens, namely, Jesus the Son of God, continue to hold to confession. *For you do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with your weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as you are, yet was without sin. So approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that you may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Amen*