

Pentecost B19
October 4, 2015
Rally Day
Central Presbyterian, Montclair
David Noble

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12

*1*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ²but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

² ⁵Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. ⁶But someone has testified somewhere, "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? ⁷You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, ⁸subjecting all things under their feet." Now in subjecting all things to them, God left nothing outside their control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them, ⁹but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹²saying, "I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you."

A

He's 67 years old and lives in a group home just a few minutes away from here. He was homeless, but in this group home he has a bedroom, along with 20 other men and women who have bedrooms there as well. He receives \$800 a month from the state because he is disabled. He pays \$750 a month for his bedroom. Sometimes he has a roommate. He says those roommates have hit him and stolen from him. He has lost clothing, a radio, his graduation diplomas, his glasses, and his money. And sometimes, he says, he feels insulted when something hurtful happens to him and his roommate or a supervisor in the home taunts him by saying, "So where is your God now?"

You see, my friend is a Christian. He can quote the Bible quite impressively. After all he did graduate from college. He has a capable mind, but his body has changed over the years, betrayed him with a condition that makes him shuffle his feet and garble his words to the point that he can hardly be understood.

Despite all this, he is remarkably able to trust in the power of Jesus. He believes Jesus is greater than his infirmity, greater than any insults, greater than his oppressors. He gives thanks to God for the gift of Jesus Christ in his life. And he looks forward to heaven when he will be transformed and all will be well.

We also struggle. We struggle with the increasing rate of change that seems like a tsunami sometimes, threatening to overwhelm us. We struggle with our own individual demons, challenging relationships, and a future that is hard to predict. And we struggle with sin that turns us away from God's help, tempting us to work it out ourselves, to be independent and self-sufficient, and ultimately self-serving.

I just went to a church leadership conference this past week. There were 2000 church leaders meeting for three days all asking the same basic question—What should we do? How do we make sense of this time we live in? How do we move forward with our ministries and reach into our communities where we know there is anguish and despair, and where lives are turned inside out?

We struggle individually.
We struggle as congregations.

B

But as Christians we face our demons, our problems, our sins, with faith and trust in Jesus. What I want to ask you to think about today is who this Jesus is in whom you trust. Who is the Jesus we want to trust as a congregation during our journey of renewal?

The letter to the Hebrews describes Jesus as the Word of God spoken to us. Through Jesus we learn what God wants. Through Jesus we hear what God intends for us. Through Jesus we see what God is willing to do in order to make us whole and live as we are created to live. In Jesus we are plugged into God.

And Hebrews goes even further: Jesus is the exact imprint of God's very being. Jesus is more than a preacher and a healer and prophet, more than someone who just represents God. In him God's glory shines. Jesus is the one who created the worlds in the beginning and the one who will inherit all things in the end—he is the Alpha, the beginning, and the Omega, the end.

The letter to the Hebrews reveals that we may follow a Jesus who is several sizes too small. We don't often think of him as the creator, but Hebrews begs to differ. And we're told it is Jesus who sustains the creation—whose power and wisdom upholds our world and our lives every day.

Hebrews aims to de-romanticize our view of Jesus, to not let him be just a warm, fuzzy feeling in our hearts. All things have their being through him and he is, in the end, the one to whom all things return. He is that grand, that incredible.

And he is fully human like you and me. As a human being he laid down his life for us. Jesus became complete, what the Bible means by perfect, when he did this for us. Jesus became complete through his suffering and his sacrifice. He gave himself in order to overcome

whatever it is that holds us down, holds us back, from living the fully human lives we are meant to live.

C

In Jesus we have been lifted up from our knees by his forgiveness and grace and mercy. We are freed from sin and granted new lives. We are born anew.

In Jesus we have been lifted up from our graves through his self-sacrifice. We need no longer fear death. He conquered it for us. He was the pioneer who leads us through it to our heavenly home where we will be crowned alongside him.

In Jesus we have been lifted up out of our isolation and been shaped into a family with him as our brother. He shares his inheritance with us, his inheritance of life ever after, new life, at the right hand of God.

In Jesus we have been lifted up from the turmoil of the world, to be centered in him and sent back into that world to serve and lift up others.

Hebrews tells us all this good news so we will praise and glorify Jesus. We are being urged to celebrate and give thanks.

The world is a mess. Our lives can be a mess. Our church can be a mess. But thanks be to God we have Jesus to lean on, Jesus to trust, Jesus to look to for hope and promise and guidance and a future.

We come this morning to this communion table. Sometimes our appreciation for this table is as limited as is our understanding of Jesus. Here we break the bread and pour the cup, reminded of Jesus' sacrifice for us. But there is more.

Here we celebrate the new life we can live. Here we give thanks for the good news Jesus brings. In a few moments we will pray the Eucharistic prayer, which means the prayer of thanksgiving.

On this first day of the week we will have the opportunity here to say
 thank you for Jesus in whom God's glory dwells, thanks for Jesus our creator and
 sustainer,
 thanks for Jesus who tasted death for us,
 who brings us forgiveness,
 who calls us brother and sister,
 who shares his eternal inheritance with us.

Today we rally around Jesus Christ whose power and glory and love and sacrifice combine to make him the one reliable constant in our lives.

Let us come to this table and give thanks, even as my friend also goes to a similar table today to give thanks for the gift of Jesus Christ who makes all things possible.