

Prayer

Holy and majestic Father of All; You have brought Your people together, and You alone know the secrets and truths of our hearts. Bless our worship of You today, and challenge us to open our hearts to You. As we sing songs of worship and hear Your Word preached and in Scripture, may we be blessed, and give You the honour and glory which is due to Your Name: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Waste

We often hear about the problem of waste. This coming week, we will pray for a number of important issues concerning the handling and management of waste within our world. This will also expose our own feelings about things such as 'recycling'. Pray today for God's people to lead the way in helping to keep our world a clean and pleasant place in which to live.

Meditation

Let us worship the Lord our God in every way imaginable!
 Let us sing songs of joy which lift our hearts in praise!
 Let us confess our faith with enthusiasm and love;
 Let us then confess sins with heartfelt repentance;
 Let us hear the words of Grace 'Your sins are forgiven!'
 Let us read psalms together, as generations have done;
 Let us pray for our leaders, for others, ourselves, and the World;
 Let us sing hymns of faith which speak of what we believe;
 Let us hear Words of Scripture, Old Testament and New;
 Let us listen to a sermon, the Lord's Word for us all;
 Let us share bread and wine in gratitude for our salvation;
 Let us bless each other with words which bind Christians together.
 Let us meet together regularly to praise the Lord;
 Thanks be to God for the gift of worship!

Bible Study - Hebrews 5:1-4

¹ Every human high priest who is chosen is responsible for the things of God on behalf of other people, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to empathise with those who are ignorant or have been misled, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³ and for this reason, he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ No-one takes this honour on himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

Review

In the course of yesterday's reading, Hebrews introduced the idea that in Jesus Christ we have a 'High Priest' who is sympathetic to our needs because He was human. For this reason, we can call on His help when we suffer from any human weakness; and the reason why this point is made is because Hebrews is particularly concerned about those within the church who are weak in faith for whatever reason. The letter now continues with a long section about the priesthood of Jesus and what it means.

Although many traditional churches still retain the idea of priesthood within the ordained leadership of the church, many Christian people today object to this, preferring the idea of the 'priesthood of all believers', which is found in the great Creeds, and is a loose way of describing what is found in 1 Peter 2:5-9. For this reason, not much effort is put into considering the nature of 'priesthood'. However, there is much to learn from what is said in the Bible about it,

and Hebrews is the best place in the New Testament to do this. Our passage today begins to describe what priesthood is, looking at the nature of Old Testament priesthood. We must bear in mind however, that Hebrews is describing this in order to build a picture of what Christ has done for us. Anything else we learn from this is a bonus!

Firstly, a priest is someone chosen by God, whose work is to represent people to God, and God to people. If we look at verse 1 and then verse 4, it is noticeable that a priest is essentially chosen. Priesthood is not something you can just have, aspire to, or apply for; and especially, it is not an 'honour' which we take on ourselves without God's sanction. By implication therefore, priesthood requires the utmost humility; and Hebrews gives the example of Aaron. He came to meet his brother Moses and found himself called to speak for him (Ex 4:27) according to the words spoken by the Lord, and was eventually installed as High Priest of God's people (Ex 31:10, 35:19, 38:21 etc.). Indeed, Moses and Aaron were both from the tribe of Levi, and God designated the Levites as His tribe of priests from amongst all the tribes of Israel (Ex 32:38,39).

The specific job of an Old Testament priest required that they made representation to God for people, seeking forgiveness of their sins through the offering of sacrifices (5:1 and also Leviticus 1f.) Hebrews points out that a traditional Israelite priest was no less a sinner than anyone else, so in order to do their work, they had to perform sacrifices for themselves as well (5:3). However, Hebrews is careful to tell us that a priest should be humble enough to 'empathise' with the sins of anyone, because they also have their own weaknesses. You may object to my use of the word 'empathise' here, because it is an English word created only in the last one hundred years (it means the ability to fully enter into the experience of another); however, in this sentence it accurately conveys what is meant by the rare Greek word 'metriopathein' (the word comes from Stoic philosophy and is all about the balance between too much and too little feeling in relationships). Given all this, empathy is an essential quality for a priest.

Hebrews will take this further as the chapter evolves. However, what we have read has something to say to us today whatever we believe about priests in the church, and especially to those who believe in the 'priesthood of all believers'. If all of Christ's disciples have a priesthood which means representing God to others and representing them to God, then we need to be conscious of our calling from God, and not consider ourselves self appointed, even as evangelists; and humility and empathy are the key qualities required. These are not options; these are essential qualities for all who would do the Lord's work! However, we will see in the next study what Hebrews goes on to say about priesthood and Christ in particular.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what you know about the work of a priest in Old Testament times, and in the life of the church today.
2. How easy is it to 'empathise' with those who have sinned in ways that we have not?
3. In what ways do people take to themselves the honour of doing God's work (see verse 4). Have you seen this happen in your church?

Discipleship

Our discipleship follows on from God's call upon our lives. It is dependent upon what we believe the Lord has told us to do, but it is something which we need to check out against Scripture and discuss with others. It is worth checking out whether our discipleship bears any relationship to the values of humility and chosen-ness, and the call to engage with others in the name of Christ. There are millions of ways in which these can be achieved, but if we believe in the priesthood of all believers, then we must measure ourselves against this call.

Final Prayer

You have understood my soul O Lord. You know the full extent of my feelings and my thoughts, and You know how and why I decide to do what I do. Give me the grace to allow You to guide my actions, and may I therefore become more content with myself and at peace with You, my Lord and my God: AMEN