

Good Friday Noonday Service  
April 10, 2009


Rev. David A. Kind  
University Lutheran Chapel  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✠ Jesu juva ✠

## JESUS THE HIGH PRIEST

Mark 15:21-29; Hebrews 5:1-9

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

he sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a bloody affair. Yet it was not the priests who suffered and bled, but the animals they slew. And the priests were not of themselves fit to stand before God and intercede for the people. Their mediation was never sufficient, for they themselves stood in need of cleansing from their sins. They too needed to have blood shed for them to receive atonement with God. The priest as a man was able to perform the required acts of sacrifice because he had been given an office by God to do these things. But if he were to presume to act as priest apart from the office and the proscribed rites and ceremonies he stood before God as a sinner worthy of judgment. Hebrews explains: "Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was."

Today a greater High Priest than Aaron and his descendants goes forward to make a bloody sacrifice. But this Priest comes without animals and birds to slay. It is not the beasts who will suffer this bloody ordeal, but the Priest Himself. He is the sacrifice that comes to suffer the consequence of the people's sin. He does not take up this work on His own, but is sent by God His Father to perform it. And unlike the high priests of Israel He does not need the benefit of another's bloodshed. For He is of Himself perfectly clean and without sin, and perfectly worthy to stand before God, both as God's own Divine Son and as the perfect man who takes Adam's place as the head of our race. And as such, He, suffering for all of Adam's sins, and for those of all his descendants - not just for Israel, but for all people - He makes Himself a sacrifice, taking our place under God's righteous wrath and judgment.

The priests of the Old Testament acted on behalf of and represented the whole nation. They wore costly vestments which covered their sinful flesh, conforming them outwardly at least to God's holiness. They wore a garment called the Meil - a robe-like garment of deep blue which was woven in one piece without seams and decorated with bells and pomegranates, representing the royal dignity of the holy nation and the fruits of paradise. Over this was placed the ephod, a square breastplate of gold bearing twelve precious stones, representing the tribes of Israel. And finally on their heads they wore a mitre with blue ribbons

signifying royalty and crown of gold on which was inscribed the words “Holiness to the Lord”. Without these vestments they could not perform their priestly and sacrificial duties.

Christ our Lord comes as High priest to perform his duties and is also vested for it, but in a significantly different way. Before He goes forward He is arrayed like royalty too by the soldiers and is mocked. Then, having been led out to the hill, before making the sacrifice, He is stripped of his clothing and the soldiers cast lots for his fine priestly robe of white. He will do his priestly work wearing nothing but the vestment of His humanity, standing in for all men. And His shame, the shame of nakedness, is the vestment of sin that He dons for us. It was nakedness that bore witness to the sin of Adam and Eve, and now He who knew no sin is nailed to the cross naked in their place to atone for it. And instead of a mitre and a tiara of gold, He wears a crown of thorns.



The high priests of Israel were accorded a great deal of honor by the nation. Not only were the well dressed and well cared for, but they had dignity, position and a measure of influence. Christ not only suffers pain and shame, but dishonor. He is ridiculed and blasphemed by the people. He is treated as one deserving of this horrific and tortuous death by those He is dying to save. But He knows the truth, crying out “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” the first words of Psalm 22, the Psalm that depicts the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God for the people.

And finally the priestly sacrifice is made complete. The crucified one’s sufferings come to an end as He cries out with a loud voice and breathes His last. And the sacrifice is received by God as all sufficient. The high priests of old had to repeat their sacrifices again and again, and the blood of the beasts they sacrificed was never sufficient to accomplish anything before God. They could not through their mediations remove the veil of separation between God and mankind. But at Christ’s death that veil is torn asunder, from top to bottom. The sacrifice is complete. Sin’s penalty is paid. In Christ there is now nothing to stand between us and our Heavenly Father.

For Christ who died now lives. Each time the Old Testament temple was destroyed the priests who served there were unable to rebuild it. They had to await others to do so the first time. And now the temple has been so completely destroyed that some claim it never even existed, at least not on the Temple Mount! But Christ rebuilt His holy temple on the third day, bringing the temple of His flesh to life again on Easter morning. And now because He lives, His priesthood on our

behalf is unending. He is as Hebrews says, a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the prophet priest and king. And now there remains no further sacrifice. It has been done once and for all. And “He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”, that is, to all who hear and believe. Thanks be to Christ our High Priest for His blood, for His sacrifice and for His grace to us. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠

