

Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-10)

10:00am Holy Communion – 18th October 2026

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark (10:35-45)

Glory to you O Lord

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

This is the gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

<Prayer>

I can't adequately explain the feeling, which goes back to my early childhood, that God has always been near me. Even before I heard His name of God, or knew anything of faith, I felt his presence in some simple unexplainable way. **Years later, I can now conclude that my image and identity have always been with Almighty God, who is my light and my salvation.**

I wonder if I can ask you to recall the earlier chapters of the book of Genesis – the begin of all things? Here are the first stories around Adam and Eve and their family, **made in the image of God.** You know how it goes: God creates people, then quickly accounts for their disobedient nature in The Fall (that's the serpents and apples). Straight away we then have the incident where Cain kills his brother Abel, which is a murderous story of rivalry and jealousy. Cain's line would then go on to multiply and spread in their families, with all the original marks of sinful humanity within them.

Although the story of Genesis accounts for this as a bad start, we also see God's image and purpose maintained as He intervenes to create a better line through another son called Seth. This ascendancy through Seth would be remembered well, confirmed by the wonderful memory (Genesis 4:26): *'At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.'* Maybe that was the first worship, the first prayers, and the first priests.

From there, humanity convulses and spreads over all the Earth in many ways. The Image of God, embedded in humanity will keep people of all times and places looking above and beyond themselves to God.

Noting has changed. It is still instinctive and natural for people to want to know God because the mere satisfactions of biological life and productivity alone are not sufficient to give us all the meaning and purpose we need. I believe that there is a moment in every person's life when they will find they shall need to seek God.

I wonder if you can remember the time and circumstance, when you first began to call on the name of the Lord?

And let us be thankful and rejoice that God can be found when we seek Him. He has made himself knowable. Across the whole of biblical history, that accessibility to God has been revealed in many ways, but ultimately God's greatest expression will be in the incarnation of Jesus Christ who is prophet, priest and king.

Part of what I'm supposed to be doing here, as a priest, is to be in some sense a facilitator, a point of expression, a director of people's reflex to come before God – to call upon the name of the Lord at any time in their lives. Who knows when that will be, but the church is always here for them when they do. <Record baptism numbers> And there were many more who have stood in this place before me, going right back to the beginnings of the first church in Haslemere. <The dead rectors board>

Let me tell you a few things about the Book of Hebrews, from which we have a passage set for us today. It's a letter (but we don't know who wrote it), where a Jewish Christian in the very early church (a Hebrew, a Jew) is now writing to other Hebrews to implore them to know that Jesus is the Messiah – the Christ – the one who was waited for, to be sent by God. He has now he has arrived. Here are the opening words from chapter 1:

'Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but 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. He 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.'

This theme of Hebrews asserts the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ as revealer and mediator of God's plan for all people. **At every point in the letter, Christ is presented as *better* than everything that has gone before.** The letter harks right back to the time of Genesis, and all the centuries following, the whole history of God's people. Now, Christ is presented as the original and unsurpassed. He is greater than the angels, better than the prophets, beyond all other priests, the laws, authorities and kings. Better than Abraham, better than Moses, better than King David. All things are in his wake.

Since the point of human creation there has always been the need for priestly mediators and revealers, all which have been people called by God and inspired for that purpose. By the time of Jesus there has been a succession of Temple High Priests going back some 1,400 years. The first High Priest appointed by God was Aaron the brother of Moses, when they were living in the desert, waiting to approach the Promised Land. Yet an order of priests existed even before that. It's where we get this curious name in our Hebrews reading - the Order of Melchizedek. God was making himself know long before Moses. Christ supersedes Moses, Aaron and all the religious system.

The author wants to argue that Jesus Christ is first in all things, not just the latest of God's strategic turns, to refresh the current and broken religious system. Christ is a priest for all time and creation – original, exemplar, primary and better than all the others. 'Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.'

So, who was this Melchizedek? Well, we don't know much about him but quickly to say that he was a sort of priest and king who worshipped the God the creator. This is 500 years even before Moses, at the time of Abraham, some 2,000 years before Christ. You can read about Melchizedek and Abraham in the Book of Genesis (chapter 14).

As the story goes, Abraham and his tribe had been in conflict, literally in battle, against other tribes who had been at war with each other. Abraham's brother Lot, and all his family, had been captured and were likely to be made slaves. Abraham went out with all his men and defeated these other tribal kings. As he is marching back home, we have this incident:

Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand. Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."

It is as if Abraham is recognised by Melchizedek as a man under God's covenant, in God's image, by another who is equally a servant and worshipper of the Most High God. Melchizedek's blessing is taken by Abraham as a sign of God's favour, and for this reason he dedicates a tenth of all he has to the ministrations of Melchizedek's priesthood, and therefore to God.

It is hard for us to imagine these ancient people and the world in which they lived so very long ago. But what this passage is telling us is that God was reaching out with his blessings from the very beginning. Across all time, God has called people to his service, not to bring glory to themselves, but to point upwards as every priest from ancient times until now has to do.

Christ came to be the greatest expression of how God wishes to bless us. Humble and meek, yet he died for us.

'So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'; as he says also in another place, 'You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek.'

The writer of Hebrews is trying to say: this Jesus he is the first and the last – the original and the best. You can do no better than him. Put Christ first and you still get all the rest.

Christ Jesus, the best priest of all, meets us in the tumult of life and sometimes conflict, with our need to meet with Father God and dedicate to Him. God's grace is brought to us by Christ's nature as a person in perfection, yet in service. As the greatest amongst men (much better than Melchizedek or Aaron), He is the best way for us to reach God with what we bring and wish to receive by prayer. Mere people as you, still look upwards by the instinct of being made in God's image. Mere priests, such as me, are just trying to keep to that truth.

Amen