

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Proper 22
Year B

Genesis 2:18-24
Psalm 8
Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews has crafted an eloquent sermon explaining the continuities and discontinuities between the Hebrew Scriptures and the words and actions of Jesus - who Jesus is. In his efforts, he is directing some of his attention to the heresies that were circulating in his time, primarily whether Jesus was actually human or not. But, he is also showing the Hebrew people that Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises, quoting extensively from their scriptures - especially the psalms.

In these early verses of the letter, the writer provides a creed for the people - a statement of what the church believes about Jesus even before the formal creeds we have today were created. God spoke and the worlds were created through Jesus. Jesus came into the world as a human, subject to all the same issues and problems all humanity faces, including death. Yet, after He had completed His work among us, Jesus was exalted to be with God.

The author continues by giving us a synopsis of the entire letter, presenting a quick glimpse of history from creation to the end of time, with a single unifying theme - Jesus Christ. We see his argument that Jesus did come into the world and take on human frailty. He became a little lower than angels, just like those whom He calls His brothers and sisters. The writer explains this through quoting the Psalms, for his intention is to convince the Hebrew Christians who were disheartened in their faith, that Jesus is the One of whom the scriptures foretold.

We are also encouraged by the example of Christ. While we may question how our salvation might become perfect, as is stated in this reading, we need to remember that the Greek word used here actually means "to be completed". Thus, our salvation was made complete through Jesus' suffering. It is through this act that Jesus has made us one with Him, allowing us to consider God as our Father.

Another issue the writer confronts is the understanding of the crucifixion among his contemporaries. The Jews were scandalized by the thought that God, whom they could not even name, could become one like them. The Greeks felt that any god who has feelings, suffers, cries, and dies is totally foreign to their thoughts. But, the writer of this letter is telling in these early verses that this is a topic he will discuss. For him, the fact that Jesus was crucified underscores the love and grace that God has for all humanity.

We are to glorify God, proclaiming God's greatness, while praising God for the sufficiency of Christ's actions. Thus, in the midst of our praise we remember the horrific sacrifice of the cross. While the world around us is mired in turmoil, sickness, and war, we have the promise that God will bring us through - that this is really a story of God's redemptive power. We need to dwell

long in this place of suffering. Our communal acts of thanksgiving in the Eucharistic feast is grounded in the knowledge of all that God has delivered us from. These early verses, and truly the entirety of this letter, speaks of God's love. In spite of all that has gone wrong in the world, God's love is sufficient to lift us up. In the very act of praising God, we are transformed into being brothers and sisters of Christ and of one another.

“What is man that you should be mindful of him?” That is the question the psalmist asks. The writer of Hebrews answers that question by showing that, through the grace of God through Jesus Christ, we are sisters and brothers of Jesus. Therefore, we can join the psalmist and say, “O Lord our Governor, how exalted is your Name in all the world!” Our song of praise expresses our faith in the completeness of our salvation by God. We profess this in the creed and in the Eucharist. Through the Christ presented in this letter, we see the full work of God, the Trinity.