

The First Sunday after Christmas

December 27, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Almighty God, in mercy you sent your one and only Son to take upon himself our human nature. By his gracious coming deliver us from the corruption of our sin and transform us into the likeness of his glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Alleluia! (Colossians 3:15).

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:10-18

“You just don’t get it!” “You don’t understand!” “You aren’t listening!” “You don’t get me!” If you ever raised a teenager, chances are you have heard those words at one time or another. (Or maybe you were the teenager who felt that way). Doors slam shut. Voices are raised. Frustration builds and explodes—all because someone feels that you do not truly understand their struggles. You could probably summarize those feelings with the old-timey song:

*Nobody knows the trouble I've seen
Nobody knows my sorrow
Nobody knows the trouble I've seen...*

Even books on interpersonal communication (that is, how your actions enhance your words) warn you: “Never ever say: ‘I know what you are going through’ because you might not truly know the thoughts or emotions that individual is experiencing.”

Maybe you agree with that advice. That sometimes people really do not understand the reason for your emotions. It is not easy to find someone who understands the thoughts going through your mind or the feelings that swell up or someone who has the right words

Hebrews 2:10-18

¹⁰ In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹² He says,

“I will declare your name to my brothers;
in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”

¹³ And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again he says,

“Here am I, and the children God has given me.”

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

to help you heal faster, is it? Maybe that song is right: *Nobody knows the trouble I've seen...* and you are left alone to bear it.

Do you think Jesus knows the troubles you have seen? Do you think he “gets you?” Can he actually relate to your struggles, your sorrows, your fears? Sometimes it feels like Jesus is distant and cold, does it not? Sometimes it might feel like the only time he cares about you is when either (1) good things are happening or (2) when you are here in Sunday morning worship. However, when you need him most, he appears nowhere to be found.

When life leaves you feeling that Jesus does not know the troubles you have seen, then go back to Bethlehem. Take what you see on Christmas Day and put it into your present-day Christian-life. Ask yourself: **WHY IS JESUS BORN?**

You know what Jesus comes to do. He comes to wash you clean from every sin. Yet, that does not really answer why Jesus becomes a human being. After all, why is Jesus born of a virgin, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and placed into a feeding trough that can hold a baby? Put another way, why does he not just split the heavens open and walk down onto earth? Because **Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity...** Not only do you and I have flesh and blood, but since we are human beings that means God has placed the demands of his Ten Commandments on us. You and I are expected love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind and soul; we are expected to love our neighbor as ourselves ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)).

You know how difficult it is to obey that command. Gossip feels so good to pass around— especially when it is about someone you do not like. Personal grudges are not overcome until the situation becomes fair and equal. Sport events want priority and tug and pull you out of Sunday worship. All too often that rebellious attitude defiantly ignores God’s orders and does whatever feels pleasing— and it only reminds us of the many times we walk distant from God.

You see, since we have not kept God’s commands, Jesus comes. He dresses himself in the same flesh and blood we have so that he too can be expected to obey God’s every command. So, when you see Jesus lying in the manger, that means God expects him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, mind and soul and to love his neighbor as himself ([Matthew 22:37-39](#)).

You know how tempting it is to disobey that command—and Jesus knows that exact same feeling. During Jesus’ entire life, the devil tries to persuade him that life apart from God carries no eternal consequences. He tells Jesus that God does not provide for everyday life; humans must rely on their own decisions. He urges Jesus to twist the meaning of God’s Word to fit his own personal desires. He offers Jesus all the riches of the world if only he worships something else instead of God ([Matthew 4:1-9](#)). You see, if the devil had persuaded Jesus to sin, then Jesus would be no different from us. He would be just another human being who deserved death in hell.

Jesus is born as true man in order to obey God’s every command so that **...by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.** No, the devil does

not determine when you will die; he cannot take your life. The Bible clearly says that the length of your life rests in God's hands ([Psalm 31:15](#)).

So, how does the devil "hold the power of death"? The devil knows the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). So, he brings up your sins and demands that you suffer the price of death. He brings up your shameful actions and accuses you of being a "fake"-Christian, someone God could never love. He nudges you, asking if God could really forgive the times you hurt your loved ones so deeply. See, the devil loves to expose your moral faults and demand that you spend eternity in hell with him so that you stop looking to what Jesus does for you.

JESUS IS BORN *to destroy death's fear.* When we say that Jesus lived a perfect life for us, we mean just that. He faithfully keeps his body free from moral fault [sin] in your place. He mercifully suffers the punishment you deserve for sin. **For this reason [Jesus] had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.**

That word "atonement" is one you hear in our confession and absolution of sins. You hear: *God our heavenly Father has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins...* "Atone" is a word picture. It means that Jesus made God "at-one" with you. He did this by taking on flesh and blood and loving his God and neighbor with all his heart. Jesus suffers the punishment you and I deserve for our sins. He has removed your imperfection and clothed you with his perfection. With your sins removed, Jesus has made you "at-one" with God.

Because he suffers, it means that you have nothing to suffer, you do not have to fear death in hell. His resurrection from the dead means that death failed; it could not hold him down. His resurrection from the dead means that all who wear the perfection of Jesus will never be held down by death. Notice, Jesus does not tell you to forget or ignore your guilt. He points you to the cross, where you see the Son of Man lay down his life for your eternal benefit.

WHY IS JESUS BORN? *to destroy death's fear.* Not only does Jesus come to prepare you for heaven, but **JESUS IS BORN** *to become your brother.*

That is really the main point of Christmas, is it not? Jesus comes down from heaven to relate to you. He comes to change your identity before God. You are his brothers, that is, people who are closely associated to him.

Do you want proof of that? Well, our writer tells you: **Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family so Jesus is not ashamed to call [you] brothers.** Then our writer reinforces that truth with three Bible passages. (1) He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." (2) And again, "I will put my trust in him." (3) And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." It is as though Jesus speaks each of these verses. Jesus stands beside you and tells the entire family of believers: "You are my family!" Picture it another way. God sits on his throne in heaven.

You and every believer stand around his throne. Jesus stands not beside his Father, but among you, in the middle of that crowd, saying, “Here are the children you have entrusted to me.” You are in that crowd—and Jesus says these things about you.

He continues saying these things about you. **For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants.** You do not see Jesus lying in the manger in the body of an angel. You see the virgin’s child and see that he looks just like you. He shares your humanity, taking on your flesh and blood in order to stand in your shoes, in your life, experience the loneliness, the struggles, the heartaches.

How do you know that? Because **JESUS IS BORN** *to become your brother*. He lives on the same planet that you do. He heard people launch stinging insults at him. He saw other preachers with larger followers. He could look around and see that many did not want to listen to his Word. It was tempting for him to do whatever it took to gain more followers, to grow a bigger crowd—even if that meant twisting God’s Word around to make it sound more socially acceptable or less offensive. There were days when it really did not seem worth suffering for the sake of his connection to God. There were times when he was tempted to think that life with God is not as enjoyable as life apart from God.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Jesus understands the troubles you go through. He does not merely pretend to know what you experience. Instead, he understands the grueling, sweating struggle of drifting away from God’s Word. He recognizes the strong pressure the devil heaps on you. Yet, throughout life, he puts his trust in God’s promises. God says that heaven is real—believers enter there. God declares Jesus alone to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Every day on earth, Jesus set his sights on his heavenly goal— and now, where is he? Living heaven’s glory.

He sits there to help you. Through his Word and sacraments, he sets your eyes on life’s true treasure. Right now, you are following in those same steps towards heaven. You are strengthening your personal relationship with God— something that does not change regardless of how many are sitting beside you. Each day you walk by faith, trusting that God has saved you. That is **WHY JESUS IS BORN**, *to become your brother* who helps you now.

Sometimes it might feel like: *Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen...* Sometimes it feels like Jesus is distant and cold. Sometimes it might feel like the only time he cares about you is when either (1) good things are happening or (2) when you are here in Sunday morning worship. Sometimes it might feel like when you need Jesus most, he is nowhere to be found.

When life leaves you feeling that Jesus does not know the troubles you have seen, then go back to Bethlehem. See the baby Jesus in the flesh, here to live an obedient life for you. See him destroy any fear of hell. See him arrive to comfort and bring you through every temptation. Take what you see on Christmas Day and put it into your present-day Christian-life. Ask yourself: **WHY IS JESUS BORN?** *to destroy death’s fear, to become your brother.*