

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

October 27, 2019

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Hebrews 2:9-18 But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

10 In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. **11** Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. **12** He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly 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 break the power of 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 them, fully human 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.

"You Have a Brother"

You know what's going to happen before they do. You're watching a scary movie. One person decides to leave the group. To go look for help. To take her chances on her own. To make sure the coast is clear. But as soon as one person gets separated from the group, you know he's a goner. You just don't know how yet. That's a familiar theme in almost every horror movie. And it makes movie watchers cringe every time someone goes out on their own. But it's not just horror movies. If Charlie Brown is more your taste, you know that Linus doesn't want to be out in the pumpkin patch waiting for the Great Pumpkin all by himself. Even if it means being called a blockhead at the end of the night.

God wants us to understand we all need community. God created us to enjoy who he is. God wired us to enjoy fellowship with others. He designed those human relationships to serve as a reminder of our relationship with him and reinforce his relationship with us. Whenever we tend to venture out on our own, Hebrews chapter two teaches us we are never alone. Whenever we feel like we are hunkering down all by ourselves, we see our Brother Jesus. You always have a brother.

1) Your Brother Lowered Himself

People who study this sort of thing point to all sorts of causes. But the one unavoidable truth is that Americans are more isolated than ever before. Most of us don't live close to our extended family. Lots of us don't live in the same place where we grew up. In the book "Bowling Alone" author Robert Putnam describes some of the organizations that took the place of extended family a generation or two ago. He shows how participation in Scouts and Lions Club and Kiwanis and bowling leagues has steadily dropped over the past few decades. People are retreating from each other.

This sense of rugged individualism that has become a big part of our American culture has taken its toll. Studies show that the youngest generation, Generation Z actually scored higher on the loneliness scale than Millennials, Baby Boomers, or the Greatest Generation.¹ And it's not just a matter of telling those young whipper-snappers to tough it out. That same research shows social isolation has an impact on physical health. "There's a blurred line between mental and physical health," says the president and CEO of a major health care provider.

God didn't want us to be alone. But since that's the way we so often find ourselves, God had to have a solution. Hebrews 2:9 tells us: **"But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."** Jesus didn't take off a cape and mask for a short time to associate with civilians. Jesus isn't the celebrity who sheds his entourage and bodyguards, wearing sweat pants and baseball hat so he can go grocery shopping with normal people. Jesus is God's Son who speaks God's Word to us (Heb 1:2), he's the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (1:3), and now resides in heavenly majesty (1:3). But Jesus was made lower than the angels when he took on the human flesh of a helpless baby wrapped up in rags and placed in an animal feeding trough. He was vulnerable to evil and susceptible to sickness. He did this all for a purpose. He did it so He could be your brother.

2) Your Brother Calls You Family

Every family has one. That one crazy uncle. He starts telling off-color jokes to grandma and tells the newest in-law what he really thinks about the president. Parents try to corral their children away so they don't fall under his influence. And if you are wondering who the crazy uncle is in your family, maybe you need to look a little closer.

There are things that happen that shouldn't happen between the God's people. Things that we might shake our heads about because the perpetrator was the Christian family's crazy uncle. But they still do their damage. One insensitive remark. One time when you felt like you were ignored or treated disrespectfully. Maybe they weren't trying to hurt you. Maybe they didn't realize how their actions were interpreted. Those events don't change the way you feel about God, but they make you want to stay away from God's family. So you choose self-imposed exile from God's house. You never stop being a Christian, but the devil takes advantage of this conflict to drive a wedge between you and God. You tell yourself you're

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2018/05/01/606588504/americans-are-a-lonely-lot-and-young-people-bear-the-heaviest-burden>

still going to read and study your Bible. But over time you see in yourself less and less of what you claim to be.

That's why it is dangerous to define yourself in relation to others or base who you are on what people think of you. Jesus has the final say. Hebrews 2:11 tells us: **"Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters."** Jesus didn't just do Christmas and coast from there. Jesus suffered because of the rift that exists between you and God. Jesus stretched out his body to bridge the chasm between God's infinite justice and your miserable failures. And now Jesus proudly announces that you are his. You belong to him. You are part of his family. Jesus is proud to say he is your brother.

3) Your Brother Conquers Your Worst Fears

If we're honest, fear has a bigger part to play in our church family than we'd like to admit. Sometimes we only come to church because we don't want to upset our family. Or we know we will let down lots of people who are depending on us. Then there's the fear that I am not doing as much as some other people at church. There's the fear that I don't know my Bible as well as a lot of other people and I might get exposed. Sometimes I want to stay away because I just don't want to be judged. I have a fear that I'm not good enough or I haven't done enough. I fear they will know the things that have been going on in my family I'm not proud of. I fear they'll be able to read my shame over secret and hidden sins in my heart and start whispering behind my back.

Jesus knows your fears and he knows mine. Jesus knows what it like to run afoul of the piety police and Jesus knows what it's like to have people openly shaking their heads when he entered a room. But Jesus kept his focus in life. Jesus kept in mind the entire reason why he became a pudgy baby and had muscle and bone. Hebrews 2:14 lets us know that singular purpose: **"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil."** By his death Jesus obliterated the one who has the power of death. Jesus didn't just let the devil's contract run out or take out his batteries. Jesus performed the A-A-B-B-left-right that completely put the devil's power out of commission.

Physical death is still a reality for every person. Jesus has just taken the sting out of death. If there is no longer anyone threatening to impose death as the sentence you deserve, if there is no sinister enemy causing dread, then death takes on a different quality.

If the demands of perfection are taken away, so is the fear that haunts you. If you don't have to have the most perfect life and most spectacular achievements to share on social media, you don't have to fear what all your followers think of you. If your value in life isn't measured in how perfectly you've prepared your home or how well-behaved your children are, you don't have live under the burden of trying to be a perfect parent. If your success in life isn't measured by your career or the awards you receive or the things you accumulate, then you have a chance for a real, authentic life. If your ultimate destination in life isn't determined by how popular you are or how well you do on the basketball team or what kind of grades you get, then your life has rare freedom. If your identity doesn't come from

the secret and shameful things you hide in your heart, if it isn't tied to the cravings you just can't shake, you have certainty that is a breathe of fresh air in this weary world.

If Jesus died to obliterate the devil's stranglehold on death, then you have the freedom of life given back to you as a gift. Jesus did what was necessary since he is your brother.

4) Your Brother Is Compassionate in Temptation

And yet God doesn't plan for us to go through this Christian life all on our own. There is something about action adventure movies that require a team effort. Movies like the Lord of the Rings where there is a fellowship setting out on a quest together. Buddy comedies where friends get into mischief that would be much worse without friends close by.

Those movies are good reminders that Christianity isn't a single-player game. We need each other. We depend on each other. That's the way God designed it to work best.

I'll go first. Pastors need a Christian community. And not just because we wouldn't have jobs otherwise. Pastors could sit in their offices and read all those books and store up all that information in their brains, but knowing facts isn't what the Christian life is all about. It is about staying connected to Christ and keeping our brothers and sisters connected to Christ.

We need real people who bring us Jesus. We need brothers and sisters who care enough about us to correct and admonish us when we stumble and fall. We need people who can be real enough to share their vulnerability about their own struggles, so we know we aren't alone. We need people who have fallen into temptation and found their lives made a mess by sin so we can point them to the same forgiveness we have in Jesus. We need people who understand the day to day spiritual battles we face, so they can help us find strength in the promises of God's Word. We need family who is there for us, pointing us to the one Brother who is always there.

More than anything else, we all need Jesus. We all share equally the need for the one who suffered when he was tempted so he doesn't stand aloof and superior when you are going through trials. We all need the Jesus who shared everything we know about our humanity minus our sinfulness. We need the Jesus who doesn't come to scold or issue more instructions, but serves us as a merciful high priest. We need the Jesus who has been faithful in every way required of us. We need Jesus who did everything necessary to bring us into a restored relationship with God. And that's what we have. We have Jesus our Brother. Amen.