

January 24, 2021 A Better Way Pt. 2 Hebrews 7:11-22

Dearly Beloved;

This morning's pastoral note is about one thing: vaccines. I know that we are in a lull in terms of the vaccination program for Covid-19. It will be February before the attempt to vaccinate Canadians really starts to roll again. The reason is that the Pfizer company is adjusting its manufacturing plant in Belgium to be able to produce more vaccine for those countries that are in line to purchase it. I have been listening to everything I could hear about the vaccines in general. Some have questioned the safety of the vaccines because of the rush to produce them. What the scientists are telling us is that the production of the vaccines which are being introduced into Canada are very safe. And in fact, the concept of "rushed" is actually inaccurate. Fifteen years ago we had Sars. The current Covid-19 vaccines have been produced based on fifteen years of research understanding this new class of viruses. Years of work endeavoring to understand genetics and gene therapy have led to the current vaccines for Covid-19. The reason we have vaccines at this point (produced in less than a year) is that the research of the past decade and a half has shown the path to be followed in manufacturing a vaccine for this class of viruses. I am not a scientist, or a medical doctor. What the scientists and doctors are telling us is that these vaccines in the Canadian portfolio, are effective and safe. If and when it becomes possible for you to receive a vaccination you should do so. I will. Barbara will. Matthew and Rebekah will.

The other thing to remember about vaccinations, is that there will still need to be a careful following of the Public Health rules after we have received a vaccination. We will still need to wash our hands, be careful about socially distancing, wear masks, use hand sanitizer, and be careful about congregating in inside spaces other than our homes. We will need to follow the guidance of our Public Health professionals. But, on the question of whether or not the vaccines are safe, the independent science is clear. They are. You and I and our neighbours should be vaccinated as soon as we can, for our own safety, and the safety of others. With that I will turn to the morning's message.

Our reading for today is Hebrews chapter 7, verses 11-22. When we approach the words in these verses we are confronted with questions. What is this all about? Who is this Melchizedek? And what does all of this have to do with Jesus? Those questions and there may well be others, reveal one thing. We are not Hebrews raised in the culture of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Hebrew concept of Priesthood. We are for the most part, followers of Jesus, who were either raised in the culture of following Jesus, our parents were church goers, or we came to faith out of the vast pagan pool. My parents were not church goers. We did not even do Christmas and Easter with anything resembling regularity. I came to faith through a friendship that bonded me with a family in the neighbourhood who were church goers. They were much more than that. They were Bible readers. Prayer prayers. And their church attendance involved them in a search for greater Biblical

understanding, so that they could live in the heart of the will of God, and serve others in the name of Jesus. It so happened their church of choice, influenced by the history of their forbears was Presbyterian. They continually sought the guidance of the Holy Spirit, especially if they were troubled by the question, “what should I do now, or next? What influenced me most was not their sense of righteousness, they were in fact very humble. When I asked questions they sought to answer them admitting their limitations. They were not ministers in the professional sense. They did not have degrees as I have come to have. And they were never trying to make me be like they were. In fact, they wanted me to find the path I was called of God to walk. And they were the ones who first mentioned Melchizedek to me. I did not keep a diary. I think I was 17 or 18 at the time.

So who is Melchizedek? The best answer is given in the first verses of Hebrews chapter 7, “Melchizedek was the King of Salem, and priest of God Most High.” The name Melchizedek translates literally as king of righteousness, and he is the King of Salem, a prince of peace. Here is where he becomes such a mysterious figure. He met Abraham (Genesis 14) when Abraham was returning from defeating a number of kings. Melchizedek blessed him. And Abraham in response gave Melchizedek a tithe (10 percent) of the spoils received through his victories. Melchizedek was not of the tribe of Levi, so technically he could not be a Jewish priest at all, but he was by the simple fact God had chosen him.

There are no genealogies that tell us Melchizedek's pedigree, or even his parents. I am not for a moment suggesting he did not have any. It is simply remarkable that he is mentioned with such reverence, and like Jesus, did not come to this "office-trade" by reason of his birth, nor had he graduated from the right schools. And we never meet him again, until he is mentioned in Psalm 110:4, a Psalm of David speaking about the Messiah and indicating he will indeed be a priest "after the order of Melchizedek."

It is clear that Melchizedek was placed in the path of Abraham, like the Brown family was placed in my path, to help me find my destiny, by finding faith in the ONE who created me, and saved me, and who made changes in my soul that led to a lot of God ordained things. Don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to say the Browns were perfect people. They were working out their salvation with their hands on the Bible, and praying diligently. Mr. and Mrs. Brown are long gone, and my best friend, their son, I have not seen for more than half a century, and a great deal of Canada lays specifically and genuinely, between us.

I would not be surprised if someone reading this or listening to me share it, said, what does all of this have to do with anything that affects my life? Precisely this: priests among the Hebrews, were supposed to come out of a specific tribe, and they were expected to have studied under distinguished rabbis. In verse 18 we find the nuts and bolts of the Christian journey of faith. The author of Hebrews is calling on his people,

Jewish by birth, followers of Jesus by faith, to stay the course, to run the race serving God in Christ and by ministering to their fellow creatures regardless of their ethnicity.

What verse 18 says, is that the former regulation (that priests should be of the tribe of Levi) is set aside because it is weak and useless. Verse 19 clarifies what the author means by weak and useless: “for the law (the rules like the 10 commandments) made nothing perfect.” Why? Because people in a simple act of will can refuse to keep them. There are moments when we are unfaithful. There are moments when we are immoral. Every day in this pandemic people in Toronto have killed somebody, and some of them have done so for no other reason than that they wanted to do so. The golden rule is blown off on the basis of...”like that’s going to happen.” In Lerner and Lowe’s Camelot there is the comment, “It’s not the earth the meek inherit, it’s the dirt.”

Verse 19 concludes with these words. “A better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.” And of course that better hope is the hope we have through faith in Jesus. At a risk of being misunderstood, faith in Jesus involves the promise of eternal life. What that means is that we are free to live dangerously. We may take risks, that others would not choose. We may run against the grain of what the world would call wisdom. We may love instead of hate. We may be honest in our dealings with others, which means we might get taken. We may choose to serve others needs, which means we may be taken advantage of. We may get used. We may feel abused by

the world. But when it comes to having hope, there is nothing like the hope we have in Jesus. I do not simply mean there is always heaven to look forward to. I mean the hope that HE has overcome the world.

I read a poem during this past week and I would simply like to share one of its lines. "Only if there are angels in your head, will you ever possibly see one." Following Jesus is a better way. And it involves us in life filled with a better hope.

Let us pray;

Lord Jesus, help us when we grow weary, to follow YOU, who is the better way. By the means of YOUR Spirit, fill us when we are fearful, or when we have second thoughts, with the better hope of YOUR Kingdom's influence. Guide us through the details of real life. Bring us home when it is time. Help us to stick to YOU, as the way, the truth, and the life.
Amen