

Mysteries and Clues

[based on Hebrews 5:5-10 & John 12:20-33]

If anyone besides my wife has ever noticed, I rarely include two Scripture passages as the premise for a message... mystery number one!

Those folks who have the honour of being asked to step into the pulpit on any given Sunday, have two options – come up with a sermon based on the nudging of the Holy Spirit, OR turn to the Common Lectionary for assistance. That resource basically covers the entire Bible over the course of three years, citing 4 different options for scriptural resources. Any single one can be used as fodder for a sermon, or you can mix and match.

I usually have my hands full just researching material for one of the Lectionary suggestions, but this week I dared to tackle two...remember I did hurt my head recently!

Let's start with the Hebrew Scripture.

Now, the Anointed One, Jesus, our Liberating King, didn't call Himself to that royal title. He was appointed to His priestly office by God, who said to Him, "You are my son. Today I have become your father. You are a priest forever, in the good and honoured order of Melchizedek."

So, Jesus became the Great High Priest which made Him the ultimate mediator between God and humanity. By this Godly appointing He serves as both the priest and the sacrifice that atones for the sins of humanity once and for all.

We, however, are also called to be priests, to one another. Whenever you share a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, or pray for someone, you're a priest, you are communicating the Grace of God.

There are times when we need a priest too, right? If we are to be like Him, we must allow someone else to serve as a priest to us.

There are times when our problems are so great, and pains so deep, and sins so intractable, that we need a person of flesh and blood to help us communicate, and carry our concerns to God.

When Jesus was on the earth, He was a man of flesh and blood. He offered up prayers and pleas, groans and tears, to the one who could save Him from death. Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. Once He was perfected through that suffering, He became the way of salvation to those who heard and followed Him, because God had appointed Him to be a High Priest in the Order of Melchizedek. Now that's a name that's not easy to pronounce!

And now for another mystery. Melchizedek was one of the most mysterious people in the Bible. He was the King of Salem (from 'shalom', Jewish for Peace), and Salem would become the site of the future Jerusalem.

The king appeared to Abraham (who was known at that time as Abram) and was never heard of again. However, what happened that day, documented in the book of Genesis, would become the primary focus of the book of Hebrews in the "New" Testament.

The two men were strangers, but they shared one very important characteristic - they both worshiped the one true God, maker of heaven and earth. When Abram was victorious in a battle, Melchizedek said, "Blessed be God Most High who has defeated your enemies for you." (Gen. 14:20) That is when Abram recognized a kindred spirit, and this great patriarch of Israel blessed the King and received his offering of bread and wine (hmm, the sacrament of holy communion right there in Genesis).

He then gave Melchizedek one-tenth of what he had taken in battle.

Melchizedek was one of a small group of God-honouring people through the Old Testament who came in contact with the Israelites, but were not Israelites themselves. This shows that the requirement to be a follower of God, was not a genetic Jewish thing. Gentiles too were learning of the greatness of God, and began to faithfully obey his teachings. As you and I learn through our own life experiences, it is our past that qualifies us to help others going through the same trials.

And now let's leave King Melchizedek and fast forward in history to King Jesus.

The beginning of our reading from John tells us that some Greeks came to the Passover celebrations. Greeks were Gentiles who believed in many Gods, so why attend Passover? This particular handful had become dissatisfied with their poly-theistic religion and were seeking an alternate belief system, and the teachings of Jesus were well known by this time. They wanted to experience that holy man for themselves, but were prevented from approaching by two disciples, Phillip and Andrew.

How mysterious that the disciples would prevent this small band from meeting the renowned evangelist! Why did they run interference? Well, they were very diligent about allowing people to come close to Jesus, because they knew the religious leaders of the day wanted to have Jesus assassinated. Yet, Jesus was ready for people to witness Him as the sacrifice for all mankind, which would open the gospel of grace to the whole world.

Verse 24 does a very convincing job of explaining that death is just the beginning of new life...the wheat must die to produce seeds to sprout a new crop. Jesus is drawing an analogy to help the people understand that his imminent death would lead to a new, different kind of life.

He then outlines two options...is our focus on our earthly life or eternal life? There is a cost and a reward to discipleship. And at this point Jesus challenges us to examine our priorities and fully surrender our lives to him.

Next, another mystery...what's up with the prayer to God revealing that he was troubled? In my mind, this is where we come face-to-face with the realities of Jesus experiencing the two sides of his being. The 'divine' Jesus courageously accepted the fact that his upcoming crucifixion was both imminent and necessary. The 'human' Jesus was well aware that his divinity would not lift him to a higher plane in which he would escape the agony of his method of assassination.

My mind just cannot fathom the depth of pain, extending over hours, that would be involved in the lashing, the thorns piercing his forehead, the spear gashing his side, and the nails hammered into flesh, bone and muscle. If we were to tally up all the pain experienced by members of this congregation – back surgeries, hip & knee replacements, fingers straightened, cancer treatments, strokes, heart attacks, by-pass surgeries, strokes...you get the point. All of that wouldn't touch the pain our Saviour endured on that fateful Friday.

Yes, Jesus admitted that his soul was troubled, but his relationship with God is what mattered more. And, just as every prayer is answered, God spoke audible words to Jesus, but some in the crowd attributed the voice to that of an angel, while others just thought it was thunder. This provides insight into how and why some people fail to see evidence of God...they miss the clues altogether, while others find it obvious.

In verse 30, Jesus has to remind the people that the voice was not for him, but for them, alluding to the fact that the people need to **witness** both his death and his resurrection. What a mystery that a divine miracle would prove a human possibility for all believers.

As we near the end of today's scripture, Jesus makes reference to Satan as the ruler of the world. Really? Well, Jewish writers don't use the word Satan, but rather 'Prince of the World', meaning 'angel'. The inference is 'Angel of Death', and so Jesus is about to conquer death, so Satan will have no authority over that realm.

Of course, the concluding reference to being 'lifted up' has to do with the wooden cross.

Can **we** believe that Jesus is the Son of Man, and the Son of God, who loves you with the greatest love imaginable, whoever you are, wherever you may be, and all He asks is for you to surrender yourself to Him and allow Him to guide you through this world's crises. God wants you to live in such a way that others will know you are His by the way you live...by the clues.

It's no mystery. AMEN