

There is an apocryphal story from years ago at the seminary—one that I am prone to believe, but it might be made up. During our years there we have daily chapel, which meets two very important needs. First, it is a part of a good and healthy spirituality, meeting together often to hear God's Word and to sing His praises, to join in prayer as a body of believers. And second, seminarians need a lot of practice leading a service in front of people if they want to be somewhat prepared before getting placed into their own congregations and not make an absolute fool of themselves.

In this tale, it was good that the foolishness was worked out of this young man at the seminary rather than on some Sunday years into his ministry.

He was all robed up, hymnal in hand, ready with the readings and his little sermon that he had worked on with the profs. He walks to the front and says his little welcome, and I'm not sure if they had just made it through the opening hymn, but this man gets flustered. Not just a little confused, but completely loses his place, forgetting where he is and where he's going, but he knows the end. So where the next hymn is supposed to be, or in place of the next prayer or psalm or reading he just up and ends it with the benediction. He doesn't try and breathe and refocus and even take a second to ask where they were, as if he had had a brain freeze—he just decides that it's best to end with what he knows and call it a short chapel service.

What would you notice if your pastors were forgetting to do something? What would just slip by unnoticed?

I myself have certainly made blunders up here in front of you. I've lost my place, I've skipped a line in a reading or in my sermon. I've used words that I had to be later corrected on, and I'm sure I've made jokes that I later asked Becky what on earth I was thinking. I've certainly been underprepared

for some Bible studies and services, though by the grace of God or by the grandeur of my self-illusion, I think I'm able to at least pretend to make it through. I've simply wept uncontrollably through funeral sermons. And these are just the things that are obvious to all of you. The behind-the-scenes items—thorough sermon prep, my devotional life, my prayer life—for myself or for you—you'd have no idea if they get neglected on any individual day or week, but pastors have always wrestled to keep the behind-the-scenes and the front-and-centre tasks balanced.

Yet God has always been left with broken men to lead His people, now, and 500 years ago, and as far back as the priesthood and beyond.

The reality is, the high priests then, called to pray and sacrifice, they were sinners. They had regimented roles and rules, so it might have been pretty easy for them to stick to the script, but they were broken people—maybe their memories slipped every now and then, maybe they slept through morning prayers occasionally, maybe they were bad at listening to the confession of those who came with sacrifices, or maybe they assigned the wrong kind of sacrifice for what they had just heard, and this meant they didn't fulfill their roles perfectly. Which also makes them relatable—people can confess their sins to someone they know can empathize.

I can get this. When we know that the person we're talking to isn't perfect either, that they're not on some golden pedestal but they struggle with temptation or their own weaknesses as well, then it can be easier to speak frankly. Like if you know that your parents had strengths and weaknesses in school, you can chat about your failure to keep up with your homework. Or if you know your pastor isn't this sinless man sitting in his office but just a regular guy, you might be able to actually communicate how you have sinned in thought, word, or deed, against God or against your fellow

man. If you know the person you are being vulnerable with also understands what it is like to need grace and compassion, it can make it that much easier to be honest about your struggles.

Where does that leave Jesus? He certainly had no sins that He could relate with. He didn't have to offer up sacrifices on His own behalf before coming before God on behalf of those whom He prayed for, those whom He sacrificed for.

He didn't relate to people because of His own sin, but He certainly took upon Himself all our weaknesses. He endured temptation simultaneously like no other and all others as He stood directly in the crosshairs of Satan in the wilderness and throughout His days of suffering. He was tempted in every way that we have been and yet He persevered in His righteousness—but He does know the feeling, He understands the difficulty, He can empathize perfectly with the desire. And He stands right there with us not because He has inherited sin passed down from Adam and Eve but because He chose to come dwell in our midst, to stand in our place.

He came, as He proclaims in our Gospel today, not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The King of Glory, the Second person of the Triune God, the One who at the End will be praised by all, believers and not alike, that He is the Lord of Lords, He entered into the fray in order to serve us and save us, and His work we hear today is a priestly work. And let me tell you, He didn't skip to the end because He got flustered, He didn't neglect His devotional life, He was faithful in prayer, and there wasn't a single day when He looked back and said that He'd have to make up for this action or that word because He'd sinned and hurt someone. No, each of His moments was perfect.

And that wasn't just in His active, loving and serving life, His active obedience to God the Father. It was also in His passive obedience, from the time He was born and suffered like He never could have deserved. He was targeted by Herod, He was rejected by those He cared for, He dwelled in poverty even though the riches of the universe are rightly His. He was lied about and slandered, and we're getting close to the days again when we remember He was spat on and struck and humiliated and killed. And not because He deserved it but because He was shouldering our sin, and living our broken humanity.

The disciples couldn't yet grasp the reversal of power and glory yet as they argued about who would have the place of honor in Christ's kingdom, yet humility and service and sacrifice was personified in their midst as Christ became the High Priest of mankind, offering up the utmost sacrifice for their sins, proclaiming the purest Gospel one could imagine, and living a life of prayer through the days of joy and utter turmoil. He praised to the glory of God, He interceded on behalf of those in need, He lamented the brokenness in creation, He truly made the Psalms His own, as He faithfully prayed and lived God's Word.

Thus when Christ, our High Priest, comes to the cross, He has left nothing undone, nor has He stumbled to the right nor to the left. He comes to offer Himself that our sin would be placed upon Him, our death meet its end in His last breath, and the devil would be silenced when it comes to our condemnation. And He arose from our fate, glorified as the King of all Creation, as the High Priest who continues to intercede on behalf on those He served to save, and He offers the Gospel of eternal salvation until the end of time.

Even now, Christ our Lord, even in His glory, He is here to serve and not be served.

Over the years I've gone back and forth on this, but what is the point of worship? It certainly cannot be selfish, us demanding what we want from God, us coming to church to meet our own needs, right? So the pendulum swings the other direction and it's all about our praise to the One who alone is worthy. But He doesn't really need our words, nor even our actions, nor are our praises much for us to bring. The fact is, we gather here today and any day because we have a Lord whose motto is service. It's not in giving us whatever we want or what we think we need, but He gives to us exactly what He knows we need. He is in the work of forgiving our sins, humbly forgiving each one even though all our sins are against Him. He is in the business of sustaining life even though we take it for granted, even causing our own harm. He is here always to sustain faith even though we are quick to wander or doubt or pick up any other little idols. He prays for us even though we are slow to turn to Him or fail to trust Him or doubt He hears.

That which Christ did on the cross, His sacrifice for our sins is accomplished once and for all, and still our High Priest is here to give the gifts of such a service, to humbly hand over the goods time and time and time again. He was faithful to win your salvation, and He's been faithful to hand over this everlasting salvation, and He alone, He who has defeated death and arose victorious, is strong enough, wise enough, faithful enough to ensure that your salvation is eternal.

In His Name. Amen.