

Who Do You See?
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
Jon Frost

From the very first few words of the letter to the Hebrews, it feels like very different territory compared to the other New Testament letters. There is no introduction of the author nor mention of the recipients. Many have commented that Hebrews reads more like a sermon than a letter, with carefully crafted theological arguments and extensive interpretation of the Old Testament.

We jump right into the middle of a story. I can't help but visualize an infinite galaxy with slowly scrolling yellow Star Wars font: "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son..." In these first four verses, which make up one sentence in the Greek, we are invited into this story of what God has done through this Son. It is poetic and beautiful. It is one text of many that show the early Church wrestling with the nature and work of Christ, a branch of theology known as Christology, which essentially asks 'Who do you see when you look at Jesus?'

A related question is 'Who is your Lord and Savior?' We asked this question last week in worship to confirmation students as they professed their faith. I must say, every time I get to ask that question, for which the reply is "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior," I am overwhelmed by this mysterious sense that all of the distance between the 1st century and 21st century dissipates. There isn't an early church or modern church, just simply the Church.

Authors Will Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas put it this way, speaking about baptism. "When we are baptized, we (like the first disciples) jump on a moving train...We become part of a journey that began long before we got here and shall continue long after we are gone." Today, World Communion Sunday, we call to mind and celebrate the scope of this moving train, what it is we join when we say, "Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior."

We join a worldwide movement of saying yes to Jesus, in which the gospel is expressed with infinite variety and reflects the vibrant diversity of those who follow Jesus. All around the world today, many will gather at tables of all shapes and sizes in churches of all shapes and sizes to celebrate our unity, our oneness in Christ. Sure, this is true of a lot of Sundays, but it is so exciting to know that there is a particular awareness of our connectedness with Christians around the world today.

This is why today we also dedicate our pledges toward the ministry of this congregation as well as our gifts towards the denomination's Peace and Global Witness offering. Both of these efforts tangibly represent our commitment to the work of the Church locally,

nationally, and internationally. There is indeed much work to be done. As you sit here today, what feelings come to mind when you think about the state of the world? Probably a mix of things but perhaps some anxiety, frustration, even fear.

The way this passage puts it is that “as it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them,” them being us. In the beginning, God gave us a vocation to be stewards of the earth. Psalm 8, part of which is quoted here, echoes the fact that humanity was crowned with glory and honor and entrusted with the care of creation. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to them. We're not there yet. But, the writer says, we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

What was spoken of humanity in Psalm 8 is now, in light of his death and resurrection, spoken of Jesus, this Son through whom God has spoken to us. The exaltation spoken of in the introduction came only through Jesus' willing suffering of death for the sake of the world. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

This Son, for whom and through whom all things exist, is the one who brings all God's children to glory. He is the pioneer of our salvation, made perfect through suffering. This is the reason we can say we believe in one Church. This is why we have communion with believers across the world. It is because the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one heavenly Father.

Friends, in spite of the messes we make, in spite of all the ways we get it wrong, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. And he isn't far away, waiting impatiently for us to get our act together. As the pioneer of our salvation he has gone ahead of us, already tasting death so that we might be brought to glory.

And verse 12 suggests something so powerful, it blew my mind a little bit. This whole passage began with the premise that in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son. We declare Jesus is our Lord and Savior under the premise that God continues to speak to us by this Son. Jesus is not dead, he is risen! And here in verse 12 words from the latter part of Psalm 22 are put on his lips; “I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters, in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” In the midst of the church gathered in worship, Jesus is right here leading our praise.

We get a fuller picture recalling the last time this Psalm was on Jesus' lips in Scripture. It begins, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus took up the beginning of this Psalm in his death, and now in resurrected life he takes on this second part in leading the church's worship even as he sits at God's right hand.

About this passage John Calvin wrote, “And it is a truth, which may serve as a most powerful stimulant, and may lead us most fervently to praise God, when we hear that Christ leads our songs and is the chief composer of our hymns.”

What makes us one? That there are no strangers at this table, only brothers and sisters in the family of God. Who do you see when you look at the Church, in all its beauty and diversity? You see Jesus, the risen Lord, singing in the midst of the global congregation, offering and leading our praise as a foretaste of what will be when the fullness of his kingdom comes. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Resources

Begbie, Jeremy, and Steven R. Guthrie. *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*. W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2011.

Begbie, Jeremy. *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*. SPCK, 2008.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and William H. Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong*. Abingdon Press, 2014.