

A Sunday Devotional for God's People in Church and At Home
The First Church of Evans
Sunday, July 19, 2020
10am Service

Greetings from Jerusalem Corners,

So...this will be the third week that most of us have been able to worship with each other in our sanctuary. It is still not yet what we envisioned when we hoped and prayed for it early in the Spring. Even so, pandemic, restrictions and all, we have resumed honoring God for his blessings in person together and I believe he will bless us for that! This morning, Carl Mende will lead us to think on the person of Christ, the Good Shepherd who has kept us one flock through these changes.

Call to Worship

Hebrews 1:1-5

Tom Shapter

*GOD, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets,
has now spoken to us in these last days by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things,
through whom also He made the worlds;
He is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person,
and He upholds all things by the word of His power.
After making purification for sins, the Son sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
having become as superior to the angels as the name He inherited is greater than theirs.
For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are My Son, today I have begotten you."*

Hymn

"All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name"

Choir Members

An Opening Prayer

Almighty and eternal Father,

Before the worlds were made, before angels flew, and men and women lived and breathed, you had a Son. And when we lost our way and turned from you, you and your Son were already intent on turning us back and bringing us home. Forgive us the sin that blinds us to your love and your plan to save us; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Devotional

John 3:31-36

Carl Mende, Elder and Properties Chair

*He who comes from above is above all.
He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way.
He who comes from heaven is above all.
He bears witness to what he has seen and heard, yet no one receives his testimony.
Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.
For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.
The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand.
Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life,
but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Our Call to Worship this morning was a letter written by a man who had something supremely important to say. So intense was the author to the Hebrews that he launches into his letter without greeting his readers or even identifying himself! Right from the very first word, the emphasis is on God and on his revelation to us. He writes: "GOD, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets...". So, for our author, both the existence of God and His revelation are assumed to be true, he knows God existed and that God spoke to man.

And the first thing he wants us to know is that God has spoken in a variety of ways in the Old Testament to "*the fathers*." However, in these last days, "*He has spoken to us by His Son*." So what we see is that God's special revelation was given in two stages, first through the prophets to the fathers and then, finally, in His Son. What this shows us is that God's revelation is progressive. The revelation of the Old Testament was not complete, the progression was one of promise to one of fulfillment. What we are going to see is that God's final and complete revelation was only possible in Christ. It isn't so much that Jesus brought a message from the Father, but rather that Jesus is the message.

We see this echoed in our Scripture Lesson. In his gospel, John wrote, "*He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all.*" The point being that there was a limit to what any fallen human prophet could teach about God. Jesus revealed what He had "*seen and heard*", something no prophet could. The revelation from Jesus was unique, Jesus alone knows God, He alone can give us the facts about God and those facts taken together are the gospel.

The author of Hebrews goes on to describe Jesus as "*the express image of His person*." This has the sense of a die in an ancient metal shop. When you stamp a coin, the die impresses its own exact image on the coin. To see Christ is to see the Father. To the author of the Hebrews, the Son is the exact representation of the Father. If you want to see what the Father is like, look at the Son. John goes on to tell us that, "*Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true.*" When a man or woman accepts the message of Jesus, they are affirming that they believe that what God says is true. To put it another way, to listen to Jesus is to listen to the very words of God.

All this drives home how superior and perfect and complete is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. God has spoken to us in these last days in Jesus. Why is this so significant? John put it this way, he said, "*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*"

John sets before us the eternal choice, life or death, the same choice that Moses set before Israel on the borders of the Promise Land, "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live.*" What matters is our reaction to Christ. If our reaction is one of faith, love, and obedience, then we will know life. If our reaction is one of indifference and hostility to Christ, the "*the wrath of God remains on us*" Because God has spoken to us in His Son. Jesus is the message, we can trust in Him. If we do that, then we have confidence in the promise of God, when he says, "*He who believes in the Son has eternal life.*"

Offering *Acts 20:35* "...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

The offering plate is placed on the way out of the sanctuary, or you can mail your offering from home to:
The First Church of Evans, Attn: Cindy Fanara, P.O. Box 364, Derby, NY, 14047.

Prayer *Matthew 7:7* "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."

Please keep the governing authorities in prayer that they make wise decisions in response to the pandemic and to social unrest. Please keep our medical people and other first line public servants and their families in prayer as they selflessly face danger to save the lives of sick and vulnerable people. Please pray for our elderly loved ones who are at home or in care facilities, and remember those people who have lost loved ones. Please pray for Jean Hill and Richard Pearson who are still in the hospital and for Don Waddell's father, Ernie, who has cancer, and for the loved ones of Lenora Brown who recently passed away.

Hymn

"There Is a Redeemer"

Choir Members

An Ancient Benediction

Numbers 6:24-26

*"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you,
and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift his countenance upon you and give you his peace."*

Mid-Week Personal Devotional

Pastor Stephen Ridge

Psalm 45:2-7

A Wedding Song

The Bridegroom: Mounted and Armed

*You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips;
therefore God has blessed you forever and ever.*

Gird your sword on your thigh, O Mighty One, in your splendor and majesty!

*In your majesty, ride out victoriously for the cause of truth and meekness;
let your right hand teach you awesome deeds!*

*Your arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; the peoples fall under you.
Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.*

*The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;
You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.*

Therefore, God, your God has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions...

On Sunday morning, we were treated to a thoughtful comparison of how God the Son was described, first, in the Letter to the Hebrews and then in John's gospel which we think was written two or three decades after Hebrews. And we heard on Sunday that the author of Hebrews was so intensely focused on Christ that he began his letter without saying hello or even saying who he was! So our Call to Worship on Sunday was fast moving and intense from start to finish. The whole sweep of the earthly career of Jesus was summed up in a single phrase on Sunday morning: "*After he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...*". In other words, after saving us, God the Son resumed his position at his Father's right hand, the place in the ancient world where only the king's closest, most trusted advisor was allowed to stand.

And our Call to Worship concluded with what would be a puzzling comparison for modern readers. Our author tells us that God the Son is "*as much greater than the angels as the name he inherited is superior to theirs*". It seems that, for some reason, he was worried that his readers might confuse Christ for one of the angels that populate the history and prophecy and especially the visions of the Old Testament people of God.

Now what happens on the far side of the spiritual veil where angels and demons contend for and against us is a fascinating topic. But in this passage the author of Hebrews is determined to identify God the Son something entirely other than an angel. To him, Christ was that divine Person who descended from heaven to become one of us, and to share with us what he possesses as God's firstborn, only begotten Son. So it follows that God the Son was divine, but also entirely human. Things God had said to mere men like David "*You are my son, today I have begotten you*" or to Solomon "*I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son*" were taken in our Call to Worship on Sunday to apply to Christ.

And the author goes on from there to speak of angels with a sense of wonder. In verse 7 of his first chapter, he quotes Psalm 104:4, where God invested in heavenly angels the power of the wind and the heat and intensity of fire. But what is far more interesting to the writer of Hebrews and relevant to us is that God the Son surrendered what he possessed in the way of power and brilliance to live as one of us, on our side of the veil, subject to temptation and opposition from the demons and dependent on the Father and the angels to accomplish the mission his Father set for him on our behalf.

So in the very next verse of Hebrews 1, verse 8, our author goes on to feature an Old Testament psalm that speaks about Christ when he was here with us. It was a wedding psalm, Psalm 45, in which Christ appears as God's chosen bridegroom come to earth on horseback, the prince of the heavenly realm carrying a straight scepter, looking to bring the bride he loves to a palace on the far side of the veil, a place where she could never belong unless she was brought there by him. The bridegroom, says Psalm 45, "*loves righteousness and hates wickedness*" and he is "*anointed*" by "*God...with the oil of gladness beyond [his] companions*". The point being that the angels are brilliant and powerful, fire and wind, but none of them was willing to stoop so low as to become a man and take people like us for his bride. No angel ever rode toward death on a Cross to get people like us to a palace. Only Christ ever did that, only he ever loved us that much.

Mark the Dates!

Kanoeing for Kids Sunday, July 26 at 10am

See the inserts in your At Home Devotionals for details about how to give to Camp Good Days and Special Times in memory of Frank Vail Jr.

The First Church of Evans Annual Congregational Meeting

**Wednesday, July 29 at 7pm,
in the Stage Room at the Community House.**