

ON OUR BEHALF

Job 42:1-6; 10-17; Hebrews 7:23-28

One of the requirements for my ordination was to take 5 standard ordination exams, one of which was Bible Content, to test my biblical literacy. The test was multiple choice. I didn't worry too much about it because I'm good with Bible stories and the test was mainly about who was in what Bible story and about when certain things did happen. But, there was one part of the test that I dreaded: the *where is it written*" part. This section gave a scripture verse and you had to type in the book and chapter and verse where it was found. I must be brutally honest; I'm never good at this. My dad taught me, when I was young, that the next best thing to knowing the answer to something is knowing where to find the answer. And that's what I figure the Bible is for. If someone asks me where a verse is, I can find it. I can usually narrow it down to the book it's in and then I can skim through the book and find the chapter and verse. But this test expected me to have the book, chapter and verse down to a random group of well-known scriptures. I knew that taking the test was going to be luck of the draw for me. I had to take that test 3 times...it was not a pleasant experience for me.

In today's scripture we see Jesus referred to as the great high priest. And yet he did not have any sort of seminary education. He did not have any sort of specialized learning that allowed him to take that role. Oh, we know that Jesus knew his Old Testament well, after all, he taught it to his followers in a powerful way. But this isn't what made him a great high priest. And it wasn't a test he took either. No, it was Jesus' humility and sacrifice that allowed him to be the great high priest that pleads our case before the judgment seat. And it was this same humility and sacrifice that allows Jesus to invite us into that same relationship with God.

These two words to describe the one in leadership in the church are *pastor* and *priest*. Sometimes, in talking about the role of a pastor, we will add the role of *prophet* into the mix as well. Often, in protestant churches, we refer to the pastor as a pastor. In the Catholic or Orthodox Church or even in high Episcopal churches, the term priest is used. This morning I'd like to explain the difference between these. A pastor is a shepherd; a pastor is someone who cares for the flock that God has given them. A prophet is someone who brings God's message to the people. And a priest is someone who comes to God on behalf of the people. Now, when we look at Jesus we see that he has filled all of these roles to some extent.

Jesus is the ultimate pastor. A pastor is a shepherd. Jesus is the great shepherd. He cares for his flock. He chases after the lost sheep and brings it home safely. The question that I have for you today is how has Jesus been a pastor in your life? How has he cared for you? What has he done to show you that you're special and unique and one of his children? You see, sometimes we don't pay attention to Jesus; we don't stop and rest and have that Sabbath that gives us the opportunity to see Jesus working in our lives in those places where we need him most. But he is there, being our shepherd, being our pastor. In the Moravian tradition, Jesus is referred to as the Chief Elder, meaning that he is the Chief shepherd, the first one who cares for the flock.

Jesus is our prophet. Take a look at the beginning of Hebrews, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." Jesus has spoken God's word to us. When God speaks to you, it is a

powerful thing. It is a life-changing thing. When God's word comes forth, things happen. In Genesis 1 we see God saying something...and then we are told that it happens. God speaks the world is created. God's word is powerful and mighty. And it comes to us through Jesus. My question to you is whether you allow Jesus' words to have this much power in your life? Do you listen to what Jesus has to say and accept that there is power in them?

Martin Luther, the prophet and initiator of the Reformation, heard God speaking 498 years ago, and he nailed the list of things that were objectionable in the Catholic Church of that day, to the cathedral door, thus beginning the Great Reformation of which we, the Presbyterian denomination along with others, were born. I often wonder what might have been different in this world of faith had Martin Luther given in the fear factor rather than stepping up in faith. Martin Luther knew almost beyond a doubt that he would lose his life as a result of his actions, but he stepped up and out on our behalf.

Martin Luther allowed his faith to lead his actions fearing not, but trusting in Jesus Christ As Lord of his life, following God's guidance to make a difference in the church that was no longer about serving, but had begun to take advantage of people who were in need of God in their lives.

Today, though there are problems within organized religion, they do not reach the level of those addressed by Martin Luther. However, in order to live into the motto, "Ecclesia reformat a, semper reformada secundum verbum Dei." Being reformed means we believe that the church is called to a process of ongoing and continual reform according to the Word of God and by the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls us to be open to the new thing that God is doing in our very midst. We must be open, willing to listen, willing to make the changes that are required as we re-form.

Each time we come to worship - to encounter the living God, to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to feel the movement of the Holy Spirit - we are called to repent and be made new. This is true for individuals and for the church as a whole and it true for First Presbyterian Church of Thomasville, NC.

One day, by the grace of God, we may find ourselves surrounded by "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." I encourage you to open your minds to the new thing that God is calling forth in this place, this community of faith. Today we celebrate the movement that began nearly 500 years ago. But even more, I charge you to be open to reform, to do anew thing, to listen to the "still small voice" that speaks, as we re-form on behalf of others who will come and be the future of FPC. Amen.