

Children's Sabbaths Faith Expression

A Designated Role

Hebrews 5:1-10 New Revised Standard Version

5:1 Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; 3 and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. 4 And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"; 6 as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." 7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; 9 and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, 10 having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

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If you've ever attended a ceremony, ticketed dinner, or a wedding, then you've probably seen a table designated as the dais or head table. And at this table, there is usually a sign that says RESERVED or in some cases, name cards indicating which guests are allowed to sit there. In some customs and countries, there is only one designated person who gets to sit at the head of the table. Usually this is based on family lineage, rank, or in the case of royalty, it is for the person who has the most authority – a prince, princess, queen, king or head of state.

This person is often revered, admired and considered “elevated” among their peers. Depending on the social location of where the person lives and depending on the governing system – like democracy, autocracy, monarchy – this person holds a seat of power and authority where decisions rest on her or his shoulders. In the humanness of the person, regardless of the title that she or he holds, they are not without fault, blemishes, or wrongdoings. In fact, this person does make mistakes. This person does sometimes do things that are more self-serving than serving the interests of the greater good. This is true even of someone in a religious setting like a high priest. There are times when the role requires you to have thick skin because of the complaints, attacks and slander that will come from people who have much to grumble about based on whatever decisions are being made. Sometimes the decisions are fair and just; other times, the decisions and laws and ordering of life are unfair, inequitable, and without regard to the most vulnerable among us.

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In our text today, the writer of Hebrews gives us a job description of who a high priest is and what the roles and responsibilities are and he makes a comparison of Jesus Christ as High Priest, designated by God, according to the order of Melchizedek. Now before we get to the biblical description of what can look like a modern-day job posting, let's give some context to Melchizedek. In Genesis 14, we find mention of him as a priest. The role of priests in biblical times was to serve as a mediator between the people and God. They administered sacrifice. They ministered in the temple and in the cities where they were assigned. It is the high priest who had the very specific role of serving as mediator and this usually took place once a year on what was called the Day of Atonement. He would enter the most sacred spot in the Temple (or Tabernacle, depending on the Old Testament timeline). He had a rope with bells attached to him, so those outside the holy of holies would know that God had not struck him dead from the sound. He would sprinkle the sacrifice for the people and himself on the holy seat (the ark of the covenant) Melchizedek was said to be of a priesthood that was greater than Aaron's. And it is from this line of Melchizedek's priesthood, slated to last forever, that Jesus fulfills his appointment as the greatest high priest. This is a designated role, designated for the Savior.

Can you imagine seeing this posting on LinkedIn, Indeed.com, or any of the other popular job sites where people seeking positions post their resume, curriculum vitae (CV), and provide a succinct summary of their skills, accomplishments, work ethic, and what they can bring to an organization, business or nonprofit? Thank God that this role has already been filled by the Designated One!

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Here are a few things to note about the work and calling of the high priest: he is chosen from among the people and put in charge of things pertaining to God on behalf of the people. The high priest offers gifts and sacrifices for sin – that is, for those things where we miss the mark. The word “sin” as it appears in the Bible, comes from the Greek word Hamartia or the Hebrew word Hata, which both mean “to miss the mark” or “flawed.” The word was used in archery and spear throwing. When a person missed the center of the target, they erred, or “hamartia-ed”. So, as this applies to sin, we should ask, “What is the mark that we are missing?”

The thing is, it's not just the people that were missing the mark, but it also pertains to the high priest who also missed the mark. Keep reading the verses. In verse 2 it says: He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since he himself is subject to his weakness. The people who are in charge of caring for the community sometimes miss the mark. They miss the mark on welfare programs. They miss the mark on funding for educational programs. They miss the mark on solutions for homelessness and ensuring that no one, including our children, has to deal with housing insecurity and failed systems that do not prioritize the mental wellness of veterans. Verse 3 continues with: and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins (plural, with an s meaning that there is more than one instance of missing the mark) as well as for those of the people.

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Though this position of being a high priest is one of honor because it means you are called by God for this specific assignment, it is not meant for the person to be glorified because all the glory belongs to God. Being called by God is not about submitting a resume of all your accolades, awards and accomplishments, but it is about submitting and surrendering to God's plan, promise, and purpose. The writer of Hebrews shares these "qualifications" if you will, against the backdrop of what it means to have Christ as our high priest. Perhaps you have heard the expression that God does not call the qualified, but God qualifies those whom God calls.

In the second half of our preaching text, we see the writer shift to talk about the one who is without fault, the one who is blameless and without sin; the one who never misses the mark. Jesus Christ. Look at what verse 7 says: in the days of his flesh – because let us not forget that Jesus was both fully human and fully divine – Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

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In the spirit of “there is no big I and little you” and there is no hierarchy in God’s eyes of one person somehow being greater than another person, to serve in a role that is self-less, and that requires a heart for servant leadership, the role of high priest in this text takes on a different meaning. It is a role that serves with the people and not above the people. It is a role that centers God and pertains to godly things and not one that centers self. The text says that Jesus offered up prayers with loud cries and tears. There was agony and angst that our Jesus dealt with when he was in a situation where death was impending. Beloved, what does that say to us about the loud cries and tears that our children offer up when they are in situations that can feel agonizing and causing angst? Instability to a four-year-old is agonizing. Not knowing where your next meal is coming from against the backdrop of a grumbling stomach as a seven-year-old is agonizing. Being evicted from your home and not knowing where you and your little brother are sleeping for the night causes angst for a frightened nine-year-old boy who is now taking on the designated role of being the “man of the house” a role for which no child should ever be given or expected to fill.

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Our children should be enjoying childhood and laughing at Bluey, a Blue Heeler puppy, who lives with her mum, dad and sister and whose energy and lovable spirit gets her into all kinds of funny situations. They should be learning new sight words and what it means to think critically as they watch Alma's Way on PBS, the cartoon that features six-year-old Alma, a Puerto Rican girl who lives with her family in the Bronx, learning to think for herself and enjoy the everydayness of being a child in a child's place.

As we celebrate Children's Sabbaths and give attention to the multitude of things that can hinder them from unleashing joy, what is the designated role that we hear God calling us to as advocates, spokespersons, and influencers in positions to help "right the wrongs" that our children are facing? Because in the words of Ida B. Wells, "the way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them."

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Closing Prayer

Loving God, help us to embrace our roles as caregivers and advocates for all children, ensuring their well-being and nurturing their spirits. Grant us the wisdom and strength to act justly and love mercifully, following the example of Jesus Christ. May we always be mindful of our sacred duty to protect and uplift the vulnerable, working together to build a world where every child can thrive. Amen.

Reflection Questions on the Text

- What are the things pertaining to God that you are charged with at home, at work, in your place of worship?
- How are these “God things” impacting the children in your sphere of influence? What can you do differently that focuses on and centers the needs of children?
- What commitment are you willing to make today and beyond Children's Sabbaths as your designated role to show up and be an advocate for a child and/or children?? How will you shine a light on the things that endanger our children?

Consider this Activity for Children:

Encourage children to explore their creativity and faith by engaging with the Future Freedom Songs: Original Poems section for kids. Here, they can read, reflect on, and create their own poems, expressing their thoughts and feelings through poetry and art. This activity not only helps children connect with the biblical texts but also allows them to share their unique voices in a meaningful way.