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Hebrews 2:10-18

A Wonderful Collage¹

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. **11**Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. **12**He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." **13**And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." **14**Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— **15**and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. **16**For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. **17**For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. **18**Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Every year it is the same. As the days lead up to the New Year, we are inundated with a collage of images that remind us of things that have taken place in the past year. There are images of combat and scenes of rescue workers helping victims after a storm. There are pictures of fallen athletes, politicians, and other celebrities. The collages of images help to define where we have been, and give us pause to ask where we might be headed. A scary thought!

In our reading from Hebrews 2, we come across a collage of images that show us who Jesus is and what it means for us. In fact there are four pictures of Jesus in these verses. Each one helps us to think about where we have been without Jesus, and where we are going with Jesus.

The first picture is Jesus as the pioneer of salvation. Verse 10: "In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author [pioneer] of their salvation perfect through suffering." For those of you who like the stories of the old American west, you surely know that a pioneer was one who traveled to open pathways for those seeking a better life in a new place. The better place was often pictured as a green landscape with good farmland and a river to grow abundant crops.

Hebrews pictures Jesus as the pioneer who opens the way to God. That is why Jesus could say, "I am the way the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus does not close the way to God. Jesus, the pioneer, opens the way to God.

¹ This sermon was influenced by Dr. Craig Koester's Hebrews Commentary.

There is something interesting about pioneers, namely, they often suffer along the journey's rugged terrain. Jesus the pioneer suffers on his journey. Hebrews says that Jesus was made "perfect" through sufferings. The word for "perfect" is based on the Greek word teleioo, which has to do with reaching a goal. Jesus reaches the goal through sufferings. The goal is that we would know the love of God.

This is important because when we think God has abandoned us. This could not be farther from the truth. Jesus, the pioneer, is with us in our suffering. And suffering is not God's final word; the resurrection is God's final word.

The second picture is Jesus as our brother. Verse 11: "So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers." This time the image is of the family and belonging. We are told Jesus is not "ashamed" to call us brothers and sisters.

Think how significant this picture is. Do you remember being fourteen and trying to impress your peers. Then, one of the younger members of the family shows up, wanting to tag along. The result can be embarrassing to the older sibling. You do not want your younger, unsophisticated brother hanging around you. Often the embarrassment wins out and the older sibling tells the younger one to beat it and go home. What the younger sibling wants more than anything is to be acknowledged.

In this passage we are like the younger sibling? We are the unsophisticated ones. Jesus has many good reasons to be ashamed of us. But Jesus is not. Jesus is not "ashamed" to call us his brothers and sisters. This is not because we are so impressive. Once again it is because of love and grace. Jesus offers us fellowship in the family.

The third picture is Jesus as a liberator. Verses 14-15, "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Here the scene is more like a battlefield. Here the need is not for acceptance but for deliverance.

The battles that we face take many forms: addiction, abuse, anxiety, death. This image recognizes that we are not free agents. We are drawn into situations where evil bends our wills. That is why we say things such as, "I never meant to harm you." "I wasn't looking for trouble, it found me." This is why a medical report can undo us. We are captive to sin. We cannot break free.

Here Jesus comes as our liberator. The weapon he uses is not a gun or a bomb. Rather, the weapon he uses against the devil is the love of God, which is manifested through his own suffering and death.

On the cross, Jesus confronted death. On the cross, Jesus was telling the world that God is not willing to let the world remain under the dominion of other powers. On the cross, Jesus confronted evil with love. It is the love of God that sets the people free for eternity.

The fourth picture is Jesus the high priest. Verse 17: "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." Here we are reminded that we are

sinners in need of atonement. Most of us do not need much reminding of this. What we need to be reminded of is that by his suffering and death, Jesus atones for our sins. Jesus' sacrificial love restores our relationship with God.

The "altar" where Jesus offered his sacrifice was Golgotha. The sacrificial victim was himself, rather than an ordinary lamb. And the reason Jesus offers himself is to convey to us the love of God that brings us back into relationship with him.

Jesus is our pioneer, brother, liberator, and high priest.

What does this mean for us? It means that God loves us. God is willing to be many things in order to love us. God is willing to be a pioneer, who suffers to open the way to him. God is willing to be a brother so that he can declare to us that we are part of the family. God is willing to be a liberator so that he can rescue us from sin, death, and the devil. God is willing to be a high priest and to offer himself a holy sacrifice so that we have a relationship with him.

This should not surprise us. God is willing to be many things in order to love us. God is willing to become a human so that we would know him. God is willing to enter water to make us his own. God is willing to become bread and wine to say that your sins are forgiven. God is willing to take many forms to love us.

Reformation, as 2008 bombards us with many images of politicians, the economy, war, human achievements, love, and scandal; let us be reminded of the love of God that is willing to be our pioneer, our brother, our liberator, and our high priest.

Let me end with the words of Romans 8:

35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? **38**For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, **39**neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**In Jesus' Name,
Amen**