

Proper 23 Year B

10/10/2021

Job 23:1-9, 16-17; Psalm 22:1-15; Hebrews 4:12-16; Mark 10:17-31

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We sure live during interesting times...

The world changes and advances so quickly.

I was amazed the other week when a few civilians went into space.

And it's going to happen again this coming week.

And did you hear who one of those persons will be...

William Shatner will be going into space next...

On October 12th... That's Tuesday!

The Canadian actor is 90 years old...

He will be the oldest person ever in space.

Captain James T. Kirk finally gets to space.

Many of us grew up with the original Star Trek show...

Either on its debut in 1966 or throughout the years in syndication.

I remember watching the show re-runs through the years.

And I have never forgot the opening lines.

Space: the final frontier.

These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise.

Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds.

To seek out new life and new civilizations.

To boldly go where no man has gone before!

And its this line (*To boldly go...*) that I always think of when I hear the words of our reading from Hebrews today:

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness...

Boldness.

It takes courage and risk to be truly bold.

One does not stumble into boldness...

It's an approach...

A determination.

To be bold... is to be courageous and confident while potentially risking much.

Certainly, astronauts are the very definition of boldness.

The Greek word translated here as boldness (*parrasia*) gives the meaning of confidence yet also with freedom and liberty.

It is a choice we make to be bold.

So here in our text we are encouraged to be bold when we approach God meaning when we approach God in prayer.

But to truly grasp this verse we need to back up a few lines.

Our second reading tells us that we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses...

Because he was tested just as we are...

Yet with one major exception...

He did not sin.

That doesn't make him any less human than we are.

But what it does mean is that he was able to do what we are not able to do.

He made possible what we cannot attain on our own.

That is salvation.

Satisfying the justice of God.

Taking on our sins so that we can be justified...

And reconciled to God when we confess Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

That is what is meant by believing in Jesus.

That Jesus did what we could not do...

And through his sacrifice we can have the forgiveness of sins.

Now the author of Hebrews uses a particular way to describe Jesus in our text.

It is mentioned twice...

And that is Jesus as high priest.

Usually when we hear the word priest today...
we think of the pastor at certain kinds of churches who wear black with
white collars...

But the use of the term priest here and especially high priest is referring
to a Jewish Old Testament understanding.

Which is full of rich meaning and particular context.

In the Old Testament the high priest had a particular function in the
community of God.

Only the high priest would have the Urim and the Thummin...

These were stones that showed what was true and what was false...

So, the Hebrews would go to the high priest to know God's will.

Not anyone could become a high priest as it was kept in a particular
blood line... The Levitical bloodline.

And when a high priest died, all those confined to the cities of refuge for
accidentally causing the death of another person were granted freedom.

It was only the high priest that would once a year be the one to make a
sacrifice for himself and the people of God... only the high priest would
enter the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement and sprinkle the blood
of the sacrifice on the throne of God...

which was called the mercy seat.

So, the use here in our book of Hebrews isn't using this term of high priest lightly...

It is pointed... cloaked in Hebrew understanding...

Jesus is the high priest...

The last of the high priests...

It was he who made the final and lasting sacrifice.

Jesus said, "It is finished"

Upon the cross he gave up his own life...

His own body...

For us.

For our sins.

For our lives.

And because of Christ's sacrifice...

The high priest's sacrifice...

His atonement for our sins...

We are implored to approach the throne of grace with boldness...

In courage and in freedom.

Our liturgy, of course, picks up on this theme of approaching the throne of grace with boldness.

During our Eucharist... In our Great Thanksgiving...

When the priest consecrates the bread and the wine...

Making the sacrament of Holy Eucharist...

Declaring what it means.

Blessing the elements.

And Giving thanks to God.

And right before the bread is broken...

We say a prayer...

The Lord's prayer...

The most sacred of all prayers as it is what our Lord taught us to pray.

A prayer that should shape all prayers.

A prayer that guides and forms us.

But before we say that prayer the priest will announce the prayer both in

Rite 1 (p. 336) and Rite 2 (p. 363) with these words:

*And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are **bold** to say,*

And then we pray... Our Father...

You see, there is not a person in here that deserves to have their prayers heard by God.

We are unworthy...

So why do we boldly say the Lord's Prayer?

Because He who is worthy has made a way for us...

By his sacrifice of which we commemorate in Eucharist.

And so, we boldly go to the Lord in prayer...

Because Jesus is the great high priest.

Boldly is not flippantly...

To pray boldly does not mean a casual nonchalance...

As if we were ordering fast food...

“God I would like this and some of that.”

True prayer is prefaced by awe.¹

By amazement.

By honor and holy fear.

And yet the author of Hebrews is calling us “toward daring, even audacious prayer”...

As Scholar Thomas Long writes:

We are... *To move past fearful prayers, tidy prayers, formal and distant prayers toward a way of praying that storms the gates of heaven with honest and heartfelt cries of human need.*

*He does not want them to pray like bureaucrats seeking a permit but like children who cry out in the night with their fears, trusting that they will be heard and comforted.*²

¹ Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 64.

² *Ibid.*, 63.

Whether we pray together as the gathered people of God...

In our prayers of the people or in the Lord's Prayer before we receive sacrament...

Or whether we pray in our quiet moments...

In our pain and loneliness.

In our joy and triumphs.

Let us in all these times approach the throne of grace with boldness...

And then the author of Hebrews writes:

So that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

You see, we are being invited into a whole deeper level of prayer.

Where we are confident that God hears us.

Where we trust in the goodness of God.

Where we know that God hears us not because of who we are or what we have accomplished...

He hears our prayer even if we have failed.

We are not worthy.

God hears our prayers because Jesus who is worthy made a way for us to boldly go to God in prayer...

And in that prayer, may we receive mercy...

Our sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus.

The wrongs we have done... our slate has been washed clean.

And in that prayer, may we find grace to help in our time of need.

God is present in our weakness...

May we boldly go to him in prayer.

May we be honest in our prayers...

Whether we say them from the prayer book,

Speak them from our heart,

or mumble them in our pain...

God...

Because of the great high priest...

Hears and answers your prayers today with his mercy and grace.

The High Priest takes our prayers of need,

distress,

pain,

He takes our infirmities,

our hunger for justice,

our cries for peace...

To the very throne room of God.

May we heed the encouragement of Hebrews today...

The invitation...

*To approach the throne of grace with boldness,
so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

May we be people of prayer...

To boldly go to God in prayer.

Amen.