



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

March 17, 2024

Pastor Mike Dietz

5th Sunday in Lent

First Lesson: [Isaiah 43:1-7](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 143 CW

Second Lesson/ Sermon Text: [Hebrews 5:7-9](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 12:20-33](#)

Rethinking Religion Jesus – Our Perfect High Priest

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours through the knowledge of God the Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ: Amen.

In Christ alone, dear Christian friends:

Do you have any pet peeves? You know something that really bothers you about what someone says or does. I have a few, but I guess the one that challenges me the most is when someone says "Perfect." When I'm at a restaurant and the server asks me what I'd like to drink, I order an iced tea, and the server says "Perfect." Then when it's time for me to order my meal and I order a Reuben sandwich, the server says "Perfect." I really wonder if my order of an iced tea and a Reuben sandwich are "perfect." I think that word is overused in our society. When I think about "perfect," I focus on the only One who was, is and ever will be perfect, and that's Jesus.

In the words before us this morning from the Book of Hebrews, we hear about Jesus' perfection. So let's turn our attention to **Jesus - our Perfect High Priest**. He offered the perfect sacrifice. He accomplished the perfect salvation.

When Jesus went with His disciples across the Kidron Valley from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives and there at the Garden of Gethsemane, He did so with the full knowledge of what was going to happen to Him in the days ahead. St. John tells us in his Gospel, ***Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out...*** ([John 18:4](#)) He well understood the anguish that He would suffer. He full well knew the sacrifice that He would offer would be far different from all the sacrifices that all the priests in the Old Testament offered and even in His own day. Those priests needed to offer a sacrifice for their own sins first because they were certainly sinners. Then after making

sacrifices for themselves, they would offer sacrifices for the sins of the people. But the sacrifices that they made were only a type or a symbol of the Great Sacrifice that was to come. These sacrifices were made over and over again. According to the writer of the Book of Hebrews, ***“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...”*** ([Hebrews 10:11-12](#)) The one sacrifice that Jesus knew He was to offer was His own blood. It was the sacrifice no other priest would want to offer let alone be capable of offering.

It's no wonder that Jesus sought the companionship and the comfort of His faithful disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane that Maundy Thursday evening. Having left most of them at the entrance to the Garden, He took Peter, James and John with Him. His words to those disciples give us a little insight into the depth of His suffering. ***“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”*** ([Matthew 26:38](#)) It's difficult for us to comprehend the magnitude of Jesus' suffering already there in that Garden. The writer to the Hebrews gives some insight as he writes that Jesus offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears.

Some well-known paintings of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane might lead us to think of that night as a quiet time, until that mob came to arrest Him and take Him away. But it was far from quiet and peaceful for our Lord Jesus. He knew that the coming hours would bring Him something that no one had ever experienced before. He was about to be mocked, ridiculed, beaten, and whipped before being nailed to Calvary's cross. He knew the agony of being sacrificed for the sins of the world. He knew that His own Father would hold Him accountable for the sins of the world and would punish Him severely for them. He knew that as the sin-bearer of the world, He would be forsaken by His own Father. Luke, in his Gospel, describes the agony. ***And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.*** ([Luke 22:44](#))

So, Jesus prayed. Some of the words of His prayer have been recorded for us. Three times He asked, ***“My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”*** ([Matthew 26:39](#)) Christians often have wondered about those words. Was Jesus faltering in the face of such a bitter future? Was He beginning to wonder if the sacrifice He would have to make was greater than the victory He would win? Was He, perhaps, trying to back out of His whole mission? The answer is no, of course not. His love for every lost sinner was far too great for that. But His words do give us a hint of the immensity of His sacrifice—suffering that was far beyond our understanding.

In a way, Jesus was like a mountain climber who tried to scale a particularly high mountain. It was high and it was dangerous and part of the way up, this mountain

climber found a ledge and he rested upon that ledge, nearing exhaustion. His beard was white from the frost that was caused by his own heavy breathing. His body ached from the strain of reaching this safe perch on the side of the mountain. So he bowed his head to pray and for what did he pray? Not that he might somehow get off the mountain as soon as possible, but rather that he might safely reach the goal of his climb, the summit.

To a much greater degree, this was the point of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Although the bitter pain and anguish He faced was beyond human comprehension, His plan was not beyond His will to accomplish. He prayed ***"Yet not as I will, but as you will."*** The goal of accomplishing salvation for the world would be achieved. Jesus, the perfect Son of God, would make THE perfect sacrifice. He was truly ***"the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** as St. John said. [\(John 1:29\)](#) Jesus was the Perfect High Priest because He offered the perfect sacrifice.

By offering that perfect sacrifice, Jesus accomplished the perfect salvation. After He left the Garden of Gethsemane and the courts of the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, He faithfully walked the way of sorrows—the way of sorrows all the way to the cross and to the joy of our salvation. The writer to the Hebrews urges us, ***"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*** [\(Hebrews 12:2\)](#) That perfect sacrifice is further explained here in this portion of Hebrews. ***"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him..."*** [\(Hebrews 5:8\)](#)

Jesus perfectly completed the work He had come to do. He fulfilled every Messianic prophecy and swallowed every bitter drop from the cup of suffering. Nothing remained to be added for Jesus to earn salvation for the sinners of this world. His task was complete. On the cross, He could declare in triumph, ***"It is finished."*** [\(John 19:30\)](#) He had come ***"to seek and to save the lost."*** [\(Luke 19:10\)](#) And He won the victory. Nothing more needed to be added, done or said. In my mind I hear God the Father looking upon His perfect Son and His perfect sacrifice and then saying, "Perfect."

The victory is ours through faith in our Perfect High Priest. Jesus is not simply some model or some example for us to follow. He is our Perfect Savior, who took our place under God's righteous wrath. It's like a young boy who was taking swimming lessons. He was going to have to swim the entire length of the pool very soon. His friend, who had learned to swim the year before, showed him how to do it. He demonstrated the strokes that he was to use and the way that he should breathe. The boy asked, "Well, why don't you take that test for me? You do it so well." But his friend replied, "I can't do it for you. You must do it yourself. Just do it like I did." Jesus is not simply our model or an example for us to save ourselves. He saved us. The Bible says that Jesus ***is***

the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. [\(1John 2:2\)](#) As our High Priest, Jesus came to offer the perfect sacrifice, Himself, on the cross. The result is perfect payment for the sins of the whole world, your sins and mine included.

Today, we don't need a priest to offer sacrifices for our sins. Instead, we trust in Jesus, who bore our sins on the cross and made full, perfect payment for them. We are forgiven and declared heirs of eternal life in heaven. Jesus, our Perfect High Priest, made the perfect sacrifice for our perfect salvation so that we can rejoice forever. And that, dear friends, is really what we mean when we say "Perfect." Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.