



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

# LifeGroup

January 7, 2023

Leviticus 16:6-16 and Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

## Community

Welcome each other as everyone gathers and spend some time catching up.

### THEME FOR TODAY

It's good to have friends in high places, especially One who knows our needs and has the love and power to respond.

Consider this true story, *Fired for Telling the Truth* from workingamerica:

*As the property tax assessor, I represented the equitable taxation of all taxpayers within our city. When asked questions by the local newspaper regarding the fairness of the tax structure, I provided honest and accurate answers. When my boss read the newspaper article he fired me. He stated the article was unflattering to him and suggested I should not have told the truth. After firing me, he ordered a media smear campaign that ruined my professional career. Under mounting taxpayer pressure, he finally had to resign. A jury and an appeals court later determined he had knowingly violated my First Amendment rights. That was nearly eight years later and I had no chance of returning to my profession.*

### ICEBREAKER QUESTIONS

Have you ever had a really bad boss, or a really great boss? The news is full of stories about ethical failures of major financial institutions. What can we learn from this for ourselves?

### PRAY TOGETHER

Lord of all of us, we gather here again to listen for your voice and to listen to one another. Open your word to us today. Give us discernment and understanding that can only come by your Holy Spirit. Be close to us as we reflect on what it means for you to be our “Lord.” Give us a new understanding of our relationship with you and show us how to live in freedom and gratitude. Amen.

## Content

In the ancient world, the word “lord” was sometimes nothing more than a polite form of address, like calling someone “sir.” But in the case of calling Jesus “Lord” it meant at least two things: First, a lord was a slave owner. Jesus redeemed us from our slavery to sin and death. We now belong to him. Second, calling Jesus “Lord” is affirming the reality of Jesus’ deity. We call Jesus “Lord” in the same way that we all God “Lord.” Jesus is our boss, *the* boss. But as we know, there are good bosses and not-so-good bosses. What kind of boss is Jesus? What kind of Lord is he?

*(Ask someone to read Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10 aloud and for others to follow in their Bibles, or for all to read aloud together.)* While we do not know who wrote the New Testament book of Hebrews, we do know to whom it was written and why. The writer is showing Jewish Christians the superiority of Jesus, particularly as our great high priest. It is possible that these Jewish Christians were experiencing persecution and wondered whether or not to hold onto Christ any longer. Was it worth it? Hebrews seeks to encourage these believers by demonstrating the superiority of Jesus in several compelling ways:

Because former high priests were human, they could only offer sacrifices, not take away people’s sins. Jesus gave his life and died as the final sacrifice for sin, truly removing sin forever.

The high priest could enter the Holy of Holies only once each year to make atonement. Because Jesus has “gone through the heavens,” he has ascended to the highest of all sanctuaries, heaven itself, and dwells there permanently with God.

The high priests interceded between God and the people, but they were human and sinful themselves. While Jesus knows our weaknesses – because he experienced all of life with the exception of sin – he is the perfect, sympathetic, merciful high priest.

While the high priest was the highest religious authority among the people, Jesus, as the Son of God, has even greater authority.

The people could not approach God except through the high priest. When Jesus died, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two, opening a way for sinful people to approach a holy God with bold confidence.

The Jews knew that their standing before God hinged upon the high priest’s work of atoning for their sins. Literally millions of animals had been slaughtered to pay the price for their sins over the years, and still the people remained sinful and ultimately hopeless. Jesus, however, has not only become the great high priest for all people, but has also become the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people for all time. His nature as fully God and fully human, fully knowing temptation and yet never sinning, makes it so. Through Jesus, the work of atonement is finally and fully completed: “It is finished.” This is why he is worthy to be called Lord of our lives.

### DISCUSSION STARTERS

What do you understand about atonement? Why do you think Jesus is often called the Lamb of God? If you were God, would you have done this all a different way?

Read or sing “You are the Lord of Me” by Randy Sims.

You are the Lord of the earth and the heavens;  
you are the Lord of the sky and the sea.  
You are the Lord of the valleys and mountains;  
you are the Lord of me.  
You are the Lord of the rocks and the flowers;  
you are the Lord of the hills and the trees.

You are the Lord of the days and the hours;  
you are the Lord of me.  
And I will praise you, for all of the wonders you've done.  
And I will thank you, for Jesus, your only Son.

### GOING DEEPER

Leviticus 16 outlines instructions for the Day of Atonement, a solemn event observed six months after the Passover celebration. It was a day of mourning, fasting and repentance, when no work was to be done. The High Priest would make atonement for himself, his household, the people of Israel and the sanctuary itself.

The word “atone” means to make amends. Sin separates sinful human beings from a holy God, and God requires a blood sacrifice to atone for sin: “for the wages of sin is death.” Rather than making people die for their own sins, God permitted the Israelites to transfer their guilt onto an animal to die in their place.

*(Ask someone to read Leviticus 16:6-16 aloud and for others to follow in their Bibles, or for all to read aloud together.)* Here is a basic outline of the day's events:

1. Aaron took off his normal priestly garments, washed, and then put on the special garments for the sacrifices in the Holy of Holies.
2. Aaron secured the sacrificial animals: a bull for his own sin offering and two male goats for the people's sin offering; one ram for Aaron's burnt offering and another for the people's (3, 5).
3. Aaron slaughtered the bull for his own sin offering (6, 11).
4. Before entering into the Holy of Holies, Aaron created a cloud of incense to veil the glory of God so that he could enter in (12-13).
5. Aaron took some of the bull's blood and sprinkled it on the mercy seat seven times (14).
6. Lots were cast for the two goats, to determine which would be slaughtered and which would be driven away (7-8).
7. The goat for slaughter (the people's sin offering) was sacrificed, and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies and applied to the mercy seat (15).
8. Cleansing was made for the holy place by sprinkling the blood of both the bull and the goat (16). The atonement of the holy place was done alone, without anyone helping or watching (17).
9. Outside the tent, Aaron made atonement for the altar of burnt offering using the blood of both the bull and the goat (18-19).
10. The second goat had the nation's sins symbolically laid on its head and was driven from the camp to a desolate place (20-22).
11. Aaron entered the tent of meeting, removed his linen garments, washed, and put on his normal priestly garments.
12. The burnt offerings of rams, one for Aaron and his family and the other for the people, were offered (24).
13. The sacrifices of the bull and the goat were completed. The fat of the sin offering was burned on the altar (25). The remains of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp and burned (27).
14. Those who had been rendered unclean by handling the sacrificial animals washed and returned to camp (26, 28).

– *Outline paraphrased from “The Day of Atonement” by Bob Deffinbaugh, [www.bible.org](http://www.bible.org).*

Why does any of this matter, beyond being interesting history? If we do not understand the concept of atonement or the role of the high priest, we will not fully understand the cross of Christ and what it means for us.

### DISCUSSION STARTERS

How does this text add to your understanding of atonement? Discuss the connection of the high priest's role and the work of Jesus on the cross.

## Application

This week, practice upside-down authority. We have a hard time not getting our way. What would it be like to spend a day abandoning our will, our rights and our preferences, and yielding to others? Let someone go ahead of you in line. Do what your kids/ spouse/friend wants to do instead of what you want to do. Let someone else be right, even if you're sure you are. If we wrestle with someone else's lordship over us in such trivial things, what does that say about our ability to allow Jesus to be Lord over our lives?

### PRAY TOGETHER

God, you have come among us in Jesus Christ to bridge the distance between us with his cross. His relationship that was shattered is now brought together in the saving actions of Jesus. We are thankful that we no longer need to offer sacrifices to atone for our sin, because Jesus did this for us. Now we can come before you with boldness and confidence. Now we can live in freedom and gratitude. Amen.

#### ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

### *Prayer at the Throne of Grace*

HEBREWS 4:14-16

From the high and lofty language of the book of Hebrews comes this simple, yet profound, truth: our “High Priest,” Jesus, knows us, loves us, sympathizes with our weaknesses and invites us to boldly bring our very lives before God. We all have trials and tribulations, to be sure, but this invitation comes to each of us: to stand boldly in God's presence. What needs do you have that you can bring before God today?

Hebrews 4:14-5:10 NLT So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. (15) This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

(16) So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. Hebrews 5:1

Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. (2) And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses.

(3) That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs. (4) And no one can become a high priest simply because he wants such an honor. He must be called by God for this work, just as Aaron was. (5)

That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father." (6) And in another passage God said to him, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek." (7) While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God.

(8) Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. (9) In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. (10) And God designated him to be a High Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

Leviticus 16:6-16 NLT "Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the LORD. (7) Then he must take the two male goats and present them to the LORD at the entrance of the Tabernacle. (8) He is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the LORD and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel. (9) Aaron will then present as a sin offering the goat chosen by lot for the LORD. (10) The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the LORD. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the LORD. (11) "Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the LORD. After he has slaughtered the bull as a sin offering, (12) he will fill an incense burner with burning coals from the altar that stands before the LORD. Then he will take two handfuls of fragrant powdered incense and will carry the burner and the incense behind the inner curtain. (13) There in the LORD's presence he will put the incense on the burning coals so that a cloud of incense will rise over the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—that rests on the Ark of the Covenant. If he follows these instructions, he will not die. (14) Then he must take some of the blood of the bull, dip his finger in it, and sprinkle it on the east side of the atonement cover. He must sprinkle blood seven times with his finger in front of the atonement cover. (15) "Then Aaron must slaughter the first goat as a sin offering for the people and carry its blood behind the inner curtain. There he will sprinkle the goat's blood over the atonement cover and in front of it, just as he did with the bull's blood. (16) Through this process, he will purify the Most Holy Place, and he will do the same for the entire Tabernacle, because of the defiling sin and rebellion of the Israelites.