

Attempts at Redemption (Lord's Day 5)

Readings: John 1:1-14; Leviticus 16:1-22

The second section of the HC deals with our deliverance from sin and misery through Jesus Christ.

The questions and answers of the next two LD are closely linked to the justice and mercy of God, and the sinner's inability to do what God requires in his law.

So the description of our deliverance begins with a picture of Jesus Christ.

He is fully human and sinless and at the same time divine.

If you remember where we are at with the Heidelberg Catechism...

You will know that we have painted ourselves into a corner.

There is no way to avoid the issue that we are sinful people...

We are looking for forgiveness...

But we have had every avenue of hope cut off.

God is righteous, pure and holy...

Nothing impure can come into his presence.

We are impure, stained by sin...

So we are excluded from God's presence.

God did not create us sinful...

But we have inherited the sin of Adam, and we commit our own sin.

God's righteous law condemns us...

We know we can't keep the law perfectly, as God requires.

We know that God can't let our sin go unpunished...

He is the just judge and is, rightly, angry about sin.

God may be merciful...

But he is also just...and so the penalty of sin must be paid.

So what can we do about our sin?

What can we do to come back into the presence of God?

What can we do to miss out on the penalty for our sin?

The blunt answer is... nothing, nothing, nothing!!!

That is where the Questions and answers are heading today.

Now it is an interesting concept that we can do nothing to save ourselves.

Did you know that this flies in the face of every other religion?

With every other religion the reconciliation,

the opportunity to be made right with God begins below...

It begins with us.

Do you wonder about that?

Is reconciliation with God something that starts in heaven or on earth;
with God or with men?

In the OT those who worshipped Baal had a complicated ritual to work through to gain the approval of Baal.

Baal wouldn't provide the rain and fertility unless you on earth performed the prescribed rituals in the high places.

When Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel,
the issue was not whether God existed or not.

The people of Israel knew God, but also worshipped Baal,
because he was the god of the rain.

So the confrontation was there to show that Baal had no place, power or authority.

Those prophets of Baal could do as many rituals and ceremonies and sacrifices to Baal...

But that would not bring the rain.

They thought, as many do, that the trigger for blessing, for God's favour begins with what we do and possess.

Modern religions are the same.

In the Muslim religion, how can one be accepted by Allah?

It's not that Allah does things for people;

it's rather that people have to make it their business to satisfy Allah...

roll out the prayer-mat so many times a day,

keep the fast of Ramadan,

travel to Mecca,

maybe even give your life as a suicide bomber for Allah's cause.

In Hinduism too to discover the godhead you have to meditate.

And so it is for every religion of this world;

the trigger for contact with the deity lies on this earth, in your hands.

The only exception to this pattern is the Christian faith of the Bible.

For us, our reconciliation begins with God...

We can do nothing to get right with God...

he has initiated it, he has made it happen.

That is where the HC is moving today...

To point us to Jesus Christ...the only mediator, the only deliverer.

The catechism points us to Jesus with a series of questions and answers over the next 2 LDs.

The Bible presents Jesus Christ to us...

In the Gospels we are told that Jesus is the Son whom the Father loves...
We are called to listen to him (His baptism and transfiguration).

Afterwards...when we know him better,
we also learn that he is exactly the one we need.

The Catechism takes a different path, starting at the other end...
It first makes up a list of requirements and finally asks...
Who is the one who can meet these requirements?

It is like when you are looking for a job.
You see an ad in the paper that appeals to you...
You ring up and they send through a job description.
It is then that you check yourself against the description of the person they are looking for.
Do you have the training, expertise, knowledge and skills they are looking for?
In what areas are you strong, what areas can you bluff through,
what can't you do?

I had a friend when we were growing up and she could talk her way into any job...
Daphne smooth talked her way into jobs she had no qualification for...
She just made them believe in her
and exuded confidence to be able to tackle any job.
Me...I was the opposite...I had the skills and training for different jobs...
I just couldn't talk my way into them.

That's what's happening here in the Catechism.
We are called to check out the job description of the person who can escape God's judgment.
The one who can pay the debt and find favour with God.

We check out the job description and say God needs to look for someone besides you or me...
We don't have the skills or qualifications...and we can't bluff our way through.

The Catechism (in LD 6) finally asks...
And who is this mediator?
And we all answer... not me...but Jesus Christ.

It is crystal clear...he is the only mediator who saves us by taking our place,
He alone can rescue us from the power of God...
And he does it in the power of God.
Jesus Christ is unique, special, vicarious and sufficient.

In 1 Timothy 2:5 Paul writes:

There is only one God and there is only one mediator between God and man and he is Jesus Christ.

Now there is no opportunity for self reliance.
We need Jesus Christ.

What we are told in Scripture is that we are bankrupt...spiritually bankrupt.

In these days of rising interest rates there are people in our community who are finding themselves bankrupt.

The increase in repayments for loans has become bigger than what they pay.

They are in arrears with their payments and the debt collector comes.

The home is repossessed and sold off to pay the debt.

They are bankrupt...losing everything.

It is sad, it is tragic...and it is a picture of our condition before God.

We are bankrupt too...we can't repay the debt.

So what have we got to live on?

Grace!

We are on a social security handout...

We are going to live by the grace of another, and otherwise we have nothing.

And you know, that goes against the grain...

We want to take care of ourselves.

We want to meet the repayments...but we can't.

And we have to be on welfare...

And that is humbling.

We live on His grace.

Not on ourselves,

not on what we do,

not on what we accomplish,

not on what we have,

but on His grace.

That means, that we now live by welfare,

by the welfare of God,

by His good grace.

So we can't save ourselves...

But can another creature save us?

Lassie and Skippy could perform fantastic feats of heroism,
saving lives, rescuing people.

But can another creature save us from the wrath of God.

It is not a bad question to ask in the light of the OT sacrificial system.

Israel was very much acquainted with animals to be used for sacrifices.

And these were to be used in sacrifices in order that atonement might come.

And they were to be there for symbols of that atonement that was finally to come

But they didn't know how,

nevertheless that was the command, and they were to be obedient to those commands,
so they brought the sacrifices.

And they had to bring their sin offerings and they had to bring their thank offerings
and they had to bring their burnt offerings, and all the various others.

And all of these animals were brought.

But there is no creature, no animal that is able to satisfy,

because an animal only has a body.

And man has body and soul, and he has sinned in body and soul and as a result of
that, those that have only the body are not able, they do not qualify, are not able to
satisfy for the sin of man.

So what do we learn from the passage in Leviticus?

In these verses we have a humble approach to God...because all have sinned.

These sins needed to be paid for...and so God sets in place the Day of Atonement.

The high priest makes a public sacrifice to atone for his own failings...

Before he could make a sacrifice for the sins of the people.

So the final question comes...

What kind of mediator are we to look for?

And the answer; "One who is true and righteous man yet more powerful than all
creatures, that is one who is with all, true God."

Now the next Lord's Day is going to go into this matter concerning His manhood,
concerning His humanity, and also concerning His Godhead.

And therefore I'm not going to go into that this evening, but simply put the
connection with the previous questions and answers.

And that is this, that when there is the attempt to find redemption,

when there is that kind of looking for redemption,

but you find that every road is closed.

Is it then a fruitless search?

If it is not found in yourself, nor anywhere else in this world...

Where is it found?

And so the last answer of this Lord's Day says, "By no means, there is such a One."

It is not a fruitless search...there is someone who can save us.

We must have a mediator who is true man.

Because man has sinned, man has to pay.

But to find a true man when there is none that does good, no not one.

We are all under sin, we are all under condemnation, says the Paul in Rm 3.

But we must find a man who is a perfect man.

But a perfect man can't do it either.

A perfect man does not need to die for his own sin.

Perhaps he can die for the sins of one other person.

But what about someone who can pay the price for each of us?

This is what God must do...

So the mediator must be true God.

So we are looking for someone who is true man, and at the same time true God.

This is the type of mediator needed.

There was no one like that in the Old Testament times, there's no one that even approaches it, there's no one like that throughout all the ages of this earth, no one even approaches it.

One who is true God at the same time that he is true man.

And so we are left with one option.

All other religions, all other ways to God have been cut off.

That is the name Jesus.

Who is true man and true God.

And that is the kind of a mediator we need.

Jesus becomes the one who stepped in our place...he took the punishment for us.

Nicky Gumble, in the Alpha course, speaking about Jesus being the sacrificial solution to our sin problem tells the story of Maxiliam Kolby.

The story comes out of the Auschwitz concentration camp in WW2.

To discourage escapes, the camp had a rule that if a man escaped, ten men would be killed in retaliation. In July 1941, a man from Kolbe's bunker escaped. The dreadful irony of the story is that the escaped prisoner was later found drowned in a camp latrine, so the terrible reprisals had been exercised without cause. But the remaining men of the bunker were led out.

"The fugitive has not been found!" the commandant Karl Fritsch screamed. "Ten of you will die for him in the starvation bunker." The prisoners trembled in terror. A few days in this bunker without food and water, and a man's intestines dried up and his brain turned to fire.

The ten were selected, including Franciszek Gajowniczek, imprisoned for helping the Polish Resistance. He couldn't help a cry of anguish. "My poor wife!" he sobbed. "My poor children! What will they do?"

When he uttered this cry of dismay, Maximilian stepped silently forward, took off his cap, and stood before the commandant and said, "I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children."

Astounded, the Nazi commandant asked, "What does this Polish pig want?"

Father Kolbe pointed with his hand to the condemned Franciszek Gajowniczek and repeated "I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children."

Observers believed in horror that the commandant would be angered and would refuse the request, or would order the death of both men. The commandant remained silent for a moment. What his thoughts were on being confronted by this brave priest we have no idea. Amazingly, however, he acceded to the request. Apparently, the Nazis had more use for a young worker than for an old one, and was happy to make the exchange. Franciszek Gajowniczek was returned to the ranks, and the priest took his place.

Kolbe was thrown down the stairs of Building 13 along with the other victims and simply left there to starve. One by one, the men died of hunger and thirst. Maximilian Kolbe encouraged the others with prayers, psalms, and meditations on the Passion of Christ. After two weeks, only four were alive. The cell was needed for more victims, and the camp executioner, a common criminal called Bock, came in and injected a lethal dose of cabolic acid into the left arm of each of the four dying men.

So it was that Father Maximilian Kolbe was executed on August 14, 1941, at the age of forty-seven years, a martyr of charity.

Franciszek Gajowniczek died on March 13, 1995, at Brzeg in Poland, 95 years old - and 53 years after Kolbe had saved him.

But he was never to forget the ragged monk.

After his release from Auschwitz, Gajowniczek spent the next five decades traveling the world honoring the man who died on his behalf.

On October 10 1982 in St Peter's Square, Rome, Father Max Kolby's death was put in its proper perspective.

Present in the crowd of 150,000 was Francis Gaj, his wife, is children and his children's children...

The many had been saved by the few.

The Pope called his death a victory...

Like the victory won by Jesus Christ.

But Jesus death was even more amazing...

Because Jesus died, not just for one man, but for every single believer.

Jesus came as our substitute.

He endured crucifixion for us.

He endured death for us.

But the worst part was that he endured the Father's wrath for us.

He endured rejection by the Father...

He endured the agony of being cut off from the Father for us.

He carried our sins.

Jesus' victory was total...

He died not just for one person, but for all of us.

And it was costly.

But what a wonderful thing it is for us!

We have new life, we have the freedom from the power of sin; the debt we couldn't pay has been paid for us by Jesus Christ.

The justice of God has been met by the mercy of God.

And we can walk each step of our lives in the freedom that that brings.

Live like that today! And every day!

We have a mediator who could pay the debt.

Praise God!