

Hebrews 2:9-18

⁹But we look to Jesus (the one who was made lower than the angels for a little while, so that by God's grace he might taste death for everyone), now crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death.

¹⁰Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers. ¹²He says:

I will declare your name to my brothers.

Within the congregation I will sing your praise.

¹³And again:

I will trust in him.

And again:

Here I am and the children God has given me.

¹⁴Therefore, since the children share flesh and blood, he also shared the same flesh and blood, so that through death he could destroy the one who had the power of death (that is, the Devil) ¹⁵and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷For this reason, he had to become like his brothers in every way, in order that he would be a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, so that he could pay for the sins of the people. ¹⁸Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Welcome Home

I.

They seemed to be the perfect family. Each family member was well-spoken and intellectually gifted. The patriarch of the family was a businessman, investor, and politician. The family name became synonymous with great political achievement. As time went on, members of the family achieved high political office. Two of his sons became United States senators. One became a president. The man was Joseph P. Kennedy Sr. Robert F. Kennedy and Ted Kennedy were the senators. John F. Kennedy was the president—one of the most highly regarded in modern American history.

But there was a deep, dark family secret. For most of her life, no one acknowledged the sister of the powerful trio of political powerhouses. Rose Marie Kennedy was born with some mental challenges. At age 15 she was reading only at a 4th grade level. At age 23 she had a surgery which was hoped to correct some of her problems with mood swings and violent outbursts, but instead she reverted to the mental capacity of a two-year-old child, and had to be institutionalized for the rest of her life.

The family explained away her absence and never spoke publically about what had happened. Joseph never visited Rose Marie again, and her mother didn't see her for 20 years. The issues surrounding her medical condition and her life didn't become known until 1987, long after Joseph Kennedy had died.

Families can be funny that way. These days there is not the same stigma placed on special needs people of all ages; one finds them living happily in the mainstream of society.

Still, many families have one family member no one wants to acknowledge very much. This one particular family member is always in trouble with the law. Perhaps one family member has a problem with alcohol or drugs, and his drunken outbursts have ruined more parties and family get-togethers than anyone cares to admit. Their behavior makes you ashamed to admit your relationship.

II.

In Hebrews chapter 2 we are told something remarkable. That is that the eternal God of the universe is our brother. The very thought is unreal.

In Hebrews chapter 1, the writer spent some time identifying the divine nature of Jesus—explaining to his readers that Jesus is God. He speaks about his power and wealth: “In these last days, [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact imprint of the divine nature. He sustains all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:2-3, EHV). He speaks about the fact that Jesus is worthy of worship because he is God: “Let all God’s angels worship him... ⁸ about the Son he says: God, your throne is forever and ever, and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom” (Hebrews 1:6, 8, EHV).

This is our brother. The one who is worthy of having angels bow down to him in worship. The whole thought that *this* could be our brother is mind-blowing. Jesus, the One this lesson identifies as our brother, is perfect—holy. Jesus never did anything wrong. Not once. Not ever.

If ever there was a brother who set an example that was impossible to live up to, it was our brother, Jesus. If ever there was a brother who ought to be ashamed of his siblings, it is Jesus. Each one of us is far from perfect. When you look at the things Jesus did—and the fact that he avoided absolutely every kind of sin and every opportunity for sin—he had every right to disown us—to completely ignore his sin-filled family members.

III.

But he didn’t. “We look to Jesus (the one who was made lower than the angels for a little while, so that by God’s grace he might taste death for everyone), now crowned with glory and honor, because he suffered death” (Hebrews 2:9, EHV).

Jesus—God himself—left his perfect family in heaven to come down to this sin-torn, sin-devastated world for me—for you. He’s the Lord who chose to live with us. He didn’t just come and spend a long weekend with us, but came for 33 years of what must have been a mind-numbing existence. No longer living amongst the perfect, but 24 hours-a-day in a revolting experience.

Why? “Certainly it was fitting for God (the one for whom and through whom everything exists), in leading many sons to glory, to bring the author of their salvation to his goal through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10, EHV). Jesus wanted to take our sins on himself and do for us what we couldn’t do. He wanted to give us the forgiveness and holiness we so desperately *needed*, but couldn’t achieve.

Kevin Bacon tells the story of the time his then 6-year-old son saw *Footloose* for the first time. He said: “Hey, Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you swing from the rafters of the building? That’s really cool, how did you do that?”

Kevin answered: “I didn’t do that part—it was a stunt man.”

“What’s a stunt man?”

“That’s someone who dresses like me and does things I can’t do.”

“Oh,” he replied, and walked out of the room looking a little confused. Later he said: “Dad, you know that thing in the movie where you spin around on that gym bar and land on your feet? How did you do that?”

“I didn’t do that, it was a gymnastics double.”

“What’s that?”

“That’s a guy who dresses in my clothes and does things I can’t do.”

There was silence from his son, who then asked in a concerned voice: “Dad, what *did* you do?”

“I got all the glory,” Bacon sheepishly replied.

Jesus, our brother, not only lived for the people of this world, but he also tasted death for everyone so that he could lead us to glory—so that he could *give* us *his* glory. He did this through his suffering. Without suffering, Jesus would not have been a complete savior. It was fitting that God the Father should have him suffer. After all, God’s goal was to bring many sons and daughters to glory. The Father’s will and the Son’s will are in perfect alignment; the Son willingly went along with the suffering.

“For he who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have one Father. For that reason, he is not ashamed to call them brothers” (Hebrews 2:11, EHV). Not only did Jesus not disown us, he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. He paid for us to still be part of his family.

Jesus is here with us today. As sure as I am standing here in front of you, as sure as the person sitting nearby you in the pew, *Jesus* is here. Listen again to what Jesus says to his Father: “He says: I will declare your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I will sing your praise” (Hebrews 2:12, EHV). Jesus is joining us in our worship today. Even as we praise him, he joins us in praising the Father.

In a few minutes, Special Music will sing in the refrain to the final hymn: “So with one voice we’ll sing to the Lord; and with one heart we’ll live out his Word.” no wonder we have come to love this place! Why are there so many families in church on Mother’s Day? It is because children of Christian mothers know that nothing could mean more to her than for them to worship with her. In the same way, nothing could give us more joy than worshiping with our brother, Jesus.

Of course, he is here to do more than be worshiped by us and worship *with* us. He is here to give to us—to give us his forgiveness so that we need never fear his anger. To give to us the promise of eternal life so that we need never fear death. To give us his strength so that we need never fear temptation. In the final verse of our lesson we are reminded: “Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Hebrews 2:18, EHV).

IV.

If you were raised in a warm, loving family, the thought of coming home immediately brings joyful thoughts to mind. I can still smell the coffee cake on a Sunday morning when I came home from delivering papers and needed a quick breakfast before church. The Sunday dinners and all the activities that took place with family are memories I treasure.

Not everyone was raised in that kind of environment. For some, the thought of their childhood home brings feelings of sadness or loneliness or lovelessness.

In the same way, some Christians have had wonderful experiences in God’s house. They found caring and supportive brothers and sisters in Christ. They found warmth and

welcome. But others have not. They have experienced unloving attitudes and actions. Their congregation has *never* felt like home.

Maybe this happens to many because of our culture's tendency toward isolation. With our electronic devices we have access to a world of information, but we hit the remote on the garage door and drive away from home, hit the remote when we return, and talk to as few people as possible in between. Many people don't even know their neighbors. Some feel that way at church. They come and go with anonymity. Often there isn't a deep connection to others at church—it doesn't feel like a warm and caring home.

This is why *Welcome Home* Sunday affords us an opportunity to repent of our sins against our brothers and sisters in Christ. We beg forgiveness from Christ and from one another for every unkind thought, every hurtful word, every self-serving action. Were we upset about something as silly as how something should be done in the congregation? Were we simply too selfish to consider how our words and actions impacted others? Were we too busy serving ourselves to think about how we might serve those around us? For all the ways we have failed to be the brothers and sisters God has called us to be—we repent.

As our loving Lord assures us of forgiveness, we look for opportunities to show his kind of love and forgiveness to the fellow members of our church family. Who is hurting? Who needs help? How can I serve? What can I do?

This attitude of love and service to our brothers and sisters creates the kind of home we all long for. It is a place where we can find encouragement as we face an increasingly hostile world. It brings hope when we feel hopeless, and help when we feel helpless.

As our First Lesson today said: "Two are better than one...¹⁰ If one of them falls, his companion can lift him up. Pity the person who falls and has no one else to lift him up...¹² A rope with three strands is not quickly snapped" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12, EHV).

Sometimes people ask if a person can be a Christian without going to church. Technically, yes. There are those who are *unable* to be active in a Christian congregation. But when we consider who is here when we gather together—our brother Jesus, and our Christian brothers and sisters—we might ask: "Who would *want* to?"

Revelation 21 gives a beautiful description of the New Jerusalem, heaven. That, of course, is the *real* home we look forward to one day being welcomed into. There we will be gathered together for all eternity with our whole family—every believer who has ever lived and every believer who ever will.

Until then, we gather together here for our family dinners at the Lord's table. We sing songs together and praise and worship our Brother who made sure that we can be members of his family forever.

Welcome home. Amen.