

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Hebrews 4:14-16  
February 17, 2013

Big news shocked the Vatican and, for that matter, the rest of the world when the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI announced his resignation effective at the end of the month. It's significant because nothing like this has happened in 600 years. The last time this happened was seventy years before Martin Luther was born. That's some significant news for the Christian world – especially for our Roman Catholic friends. Now, Pope Benedict XVI explained why he will be resigning, but I don't think any of us could imagine what it takes to be pope. No one can understand what he has gone through filling this extremely unique post. None of us could understand what it would be like to walk in his shoes

For that matter, we cannot know exactly what it is like to fill the shoes of anyone else other than our own. We can get close. We might have been in the same position as someone else – having to make the same decisions – or – struggling with the same situation or even terrible disease. But unless we were to have their children or their parents – unless we had their spouse, their job, their house, their doctor and their way of dealing with things – we simply cannot know exactly what anyone else is going through.

But it's all different with Jesus. They say to walk a mile in someone's shoes before passing judgment. With us, even our steps within that mile will be different than anyone else's. But it's all different with Jesus. He knows our steps – every one of them. He knows all our struggles and our burdens. He knows our concerns and our sufferings. He knows them like we know them – even more. He knows them to the fullest extent.

Listen again to these words from Hebrews chapter four, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*" There is something you must know about the book of Hebrews if you don't already. This book in the New Testament connects God's people with Old Testament like no other book in the Bible. Hebrews describes the glories of the old covenant but also reminds the readers of how it is surpassed by the glories of the new covenant. Who is that new covenant? It is Jesus, of course.

According to the old covenant the high priest would enter the temple's Holy of Holies just once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur. The blood sacrifice was applied to certain areas in the various places the high priest was directed according to the law. The Day of Atonement was for the sake of the sins of God's people – and the high priest was put into service to accomplish this task.

Hebrews shows us who our high priest is according to the new covenant – one who can sympathize with all our weaknesses – who knows us through and through. You see, Jesus our new covenant high priest is unique in this situation... He is both the high priest who knows us completely, and He the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. When is that Day of Atonement? Once a year? No! It is today and every day.

We have a high priest, it says in the text, who can sympathize with our weaknesses. The Greek word translated sympathize is perhaps better translated as "suffering" or "suffering the same things." We have a high priest who knows suffering – our "same sufferings." Yes, we surely do. All we have to do is go back to the Gospel text for today and see what Jesus went

through in the desert. Jesus was tempted by the devil to put Himself and His needs first and leave you behind. Jesus would be tempted to do such a thing... but He would never do it. These sufferings in the desert show us what kind of faithful God we have – who knows all our sufferings – from the desert all the way to the cross.

We have a high priest who knows it all. He knows every struggle and He knows every ounce of our pain. He knows it to the fullest extent – more than anyone ever could. Jesus is that kind of high priest that knows us through and through. Talk about walking a mile in our shoes – Jesus walked every bit of it and even more. Beloved, take comfort in knowing that we have a Jesus who knows our “same” sufferings. We are never alone.

Loneliness is a plague on us all. For forty days Jesus suffered loneliness in the desert – having no company but the devil. I know that God’s people, you, have felt this way when the trials of life hit you hard. This world can make faithful people like you feel very alone. Sin, death and the devil have as their first priority to make you feel like there is nothing to help, nothing to support, no one who can understand and no one who can rescue you. Your sins literally attempt to separate you from the love of Jesus. They drive a deep wedge between what God wants for you and where you find yourself. Our sins cause extreme loneliness and they lie to you telling you there is no hope and no one to save you. Loneliness is the worst, is the scariest place to be in your life and sin and this world accentuates all of this more and more. Being alone means having no one. That, beloved in the Lord, is simply not true. You are never alone.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize (suffer the same things) with our weaknesses. Jesus sufferings the same things – with you. That’s your God. Your God knows all of you. He came to suffer for you in every way... even taking on the same flesh you have. Everything you suffer Jesus has suffered for all. Thank God, God is our Mighty Fortress.

We sang this well-known hymn written by Martin Luther to begin this Service and this Season of Lent. Jesus our Savior must be a mighty fortress to take on all the weaknesses of the world. This hymn has a storied history that reminds us of a trusty shield and weapon – one that we can always rely on. This hymn was sung at the Diet of Augsburg in 1555 and became the national hymn of Protestant Germany during the time of the Reformation. This hymn was the battle cry of the army of Gustavus Adolphus during the Thirty Years’ War. This hymn had been translated into more languages than any other hymn in Christendom. There is no fortress stronger than our Lord. And in this season of penitence a fortress is what we will need in this call to repentance – a call from the loneliness of sin to the company of our Savior.

We cannot walk in the shoes of our neighbor – not to the fullest extent. But we can walk with our neighbor because Christ walks in our shoes. Be a neighbor to your neighbor. Walk with them as they walk with you. You are not alone. Your Savior knows and “suffers the same things”—He sympathizes with our weakness even beyond what we could possibly imagine. Jesus our mighty fortress is by our side as we make this journey one step at a time – in the shoes God has given us to wear. We sometimes wonder why these shoes. But we never have to ask who else has been wearing these shoes. Jesus our Savior. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.