

To compare the current political climate to a dumpster fire would be an insult to dumpster fires everywhere. We all know things are crazy. Our nation is angry. As Election Day approaches, many struggle with fear and a genuine sense of despair if their ideal candidate doesn't win. Additionally, the fact that the incumbent president is not running for re-election means America's next president will be different from the current one. There will be a transition, whether America's next president is the sitting vice president or the former president. Things are going to **change** in Washington and at the White House.

This Sunday's Scripture speaks of another transition—that of Israel's high priests. Verse 23 says, *“Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office.”* Quite simply, God's Old Testament people had many high priests because the former priests just kept dying. So, while the priest's job description didn't **change**, the priests did. What's true of nations and companies and schools and churches, is that **changes** in leadership create anxiety for those they lead. By the amazing grace of God, **change** can be good. But **change** is usually difficult in some ways. Even though all of Israel's high priests eventually died, verse 24 declares that Jesus *“lives forever.”* This is **a huge change**. The old imperfect priesthood ends. And our Redeemer lives!

We can only imagine the kind of anxiety that was produced among God's Israelite people. After all, among other things, different priests had different personalities and gifts. On top of that, those priests were all morally flawed. Verse 27 basically repeats the observation from chapter 5 of the priest's need to *“offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people.”* So, while priests changed, **their sinfulness never changed**.

It seems to me no matter how well people, groups and organizations handle transition, it automatically produces anxiety. We naturally wonder what this **specific change** will bring to our families, our workplaces and our world. For example, both Americans and the nations of the world wonder whether America's ways of dealing with internal matters as well as foreign policy will **change** with a new president. Realistically, we voters also realize that all campaign rhetoric won't exactly match actual presidential policy.

Verse 28 explicitly refers to Israel's high priests' weakness. It notes "*For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness.*" While the Greek word *astheneian* allows for either physical or moral weakness, the context of this verse implies moral weakness, while also at least hinting at the physical weakness that eventually killed all of Israel's high priests. Those priests, as *The Message* paraphrases this verse, are "*men who are never able to get the job done right.*"

I have two colleagues and friends who have recently retired from their respective churches—one after 31 years of service in Buffalo and the other after 28 years of service in Cleveland. Both served admirably, but they—like all of us—are morally flawed persons. I'm sure there were days when they failed to love God and love their neighbor, just as there are days when I fail to do so. And I'm certain they were able to minister to some people more effectively than others. The period of transition in church leadership was a time of real anxiety for some of the members of their churches. People wondered what the new pastor would be like. Some people are still wondering what the church will be like going forward, even after they called a new pastor.

Bearing in mind all the **changes** that life brings us, please hear what great good news this Sunday's Scripture offers! While high priests as well as other human leaders change, **our Great High Priest never changes**. He is, in fact, "*the same yesterday and today and forever,*" according to Hebrews 13:8. While all of Israel's high priests eventually died, verse 24 reminds us that Jesus "*lives forever.*" While the Romans collaborated with religious leaders to execute Jesus, God raised him from the dead. He can no longer die.

As a result, we rejoice with verse 24 that Jesus has a "*permanent priesthood.*" The "term in office" for Israel's high priests were only temporary. Those priests, after all, continued to die. Only the destruction of the Second Temple in a sense ended their dying because it ended their priesthood. The priesthood of Jesus, God's Temple among his people, is totally different. He literally "*always lives to intercede*" (v. 25) for us. In other words, he lives forever. God's dearly loved sons and daughters will never need to experience the transition to a new high priest. It's now Jesus' job forever. That means until he graciously ushers his followers into the new heaven and earth, he'll never "leave office."

Because neither sin nor death can ever touch him, Jesus is, according to verse 25, “*able to save completely those who come to God through him.*” Jesus breaks sin, death and Satan’s stranglehold on his siblings who respond to God’s amazing grace by trusting in him by faith. Since **change** is a constant feature of life in God’s world, it comes to everything, including the church and its leadership. **Amid all that change** stands one great and gracious constant which is this: Jesus completely and for all-time saves God’s beloved people.

In fact, Hebrews 7:25 makes what seems like a startling statement about Jesus’ saving power. He doesn’t just live forever. Again, Jesus “*always lives to intercede for*” us, his adopted brothers and sisters. This is one of the central doctrines of the faith which the Church often pays little attention. Jesus didn’t just live, die and rise again to rescue God’s people from our sins. He didn’t just ascend to God’s right hand where he awaits his return to judge the living and the dead as well as usher in the new creation...

Jesus also lives to speak on our behalf before the Father—always. I sometimes wonder if we underplay this amazing grace because we’re not quite sure how one member of the Trinity can actually speak to another. But the mystery of Christ’s intercession on our behalf ought not diminish its startling beauty. **The point is that** Jesus is in the heavenly realm from now to eternity to save everyone who comes to God through him, always on the job to speak up for them. Jesus is our perfect High Priest whose intercession is effective because he was perfect. Unlike Israel’s other high priests, he is “*holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens*” as verse 26 describes him.

Though the Holy Spirit inspired Hebrews’ author, we can sense that he struggles to find words to adequately describe Jesus’ exceeding greatness and moral perfection. It’s as if he’s piling adjective upon adjective to try to reveal our Great High Priest’s superiority to all other priests. Jesus was, in fact, so great that he didn’t have to offer multiple sacrifices for others or sacrifices on his own behalf. Verse 27 rejoices that “*he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day...He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*” Jesus didn’t need to offer up animals or anything else as sacrifices on behalf of God’s children. By offering up himself at Calvary’s cross, he was the sacrifice that was so perfect that it will never need to be repeated.

The violence of the cross makes some of us squeamish to talk about the gruesome nature of Jesus' saving work on our behalf. Of course, there are all sorts of elements to that rescuing work. The Church needs to do a better job of talking about all the ways that Jesus acted to save God's beloved people.

Though it's hard to think and talk about, we do ourselves no favors when we simply ignore that to which the Bible gives such a prominent place: the self-emptying, sacrificial nature of Jesus' suffering saving work on our behalf.

This Sunday's Scripture reminds all Christians that the triune God loved his people so unconditionally and completely that God gave up nearly everything to rescue us and adopt us as his children. God the Father let powerful political, military and religious figures do their worst to God's one and only Son to strip evil of its ability to do its worst to the followers of Jesus—for all time.

But many of us have asked "Why did Jesus have to die?" A story my friend tells may help show why Jesus went to the cross. Roy grew up extremely poor. He loved baseball and his parents saved and saved and finally were able to buy him a baseball mitt. Unfortunately, they bought Roy a catcher's mitt and he played short-stop. A young friend, who had an infielder's mitt, loaned Roy his mitt. But one day while practicing, Roy reached for a ball and the mitt flew off and into the creek behind his house. It was ruined. Roy apologized profusely to his friend and asked sincerely what he could do to make amends. He had no money to buy his friend a new mitt to replace the one he ruined. What could he do? His friend had a solution: Toss your catcher's mitt into the creek. And Roy did. Roy's selfless act doesn't restore what is lost. However, what it does is acknowledge the value and worth of what is lost. Ruining Roy's mitt didn't restore his friend's mitt. But it did pay the price by acknowledging the worth of the mitt that was lost. Similarly, that's one reason Jesus had to die.

"He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself" says verse 27. He paid the price. What Christ did for us shows the value and worth God has placed on every one of us. What should we do in response? We can say with Paul from his second letter to the Corinthians: *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* (9:15).

God bless this simple witness to his word. Amen.