

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
The first Sunday after Christmas
December 29, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Send in the substitute!

¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² He says: I will declare your name to my brothers. Within the congregation I will sing your praise. ¹³ And again: I will trust in him. And again: Here I am and the children God has given me. ¹⁴ Therefore, 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) ¹⁵ and free those who were held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely he was not concerned with helping angels but with helping Abraham's offspring. ¹⁷ For 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. ¹⁸ Indeed, because he suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. – Hebrews 2:10-18 EHV

Have you seen Progressive's commercial campaign called "The Backup?" This is a series of scenarios in which people need a backup to come in and give them help. From backing up a trailer to doing taxes, the backups come to help out these individuals with various tasks. The fun part about these commercials is the backups who come to help are all career backup quarterbacks from the NFL. The concept of this campaign is that it would be nice to have a substitute in life when you can't do the task on your own. They say since we don't have those, at least you can have Progressive to back you up when life gets tough. Here is an issue with the concept of this campaign. There is a substitute for the things we cannot do. The substitute is Jesus. In today's lesson, we see Jesus came to be our substitute in life and death.

We are in Hebrews today, which has one clear theme: Jesus is greater. Jesus is greater than everyone and everything. Although the overall message of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus is greater, one of the supporting points that leads to demonstrate that Jesus is greater is that he is just like you. This elevates what he can do for you. In today's lesson, we see that Jesus is greater because Jesus is our substitute.

There is a need for a substitute in life because of humanity's inability to live the perfect life that God demands. The standard of God's law is higher than sinful humans can reach. Go to Psalm 19. Go to Romans 3. In both places of Scripture, you will see the truth that all of humanity is sinful and incapable of living the perfect life that God demands. Humanity needs a substitute.

The verses from Hebrews that we look to today demonstrate Jesus was the substitute for humanity. His affinity with humans is shown through a quotation of Old Testament Scripture, specifically Psalm 22. The quotation from Psalm 22 comes from the third part of the psalm. This is the part that focuses on Jesus' exaltation. The statement of calling humans "brothers" shows Jesus' affinity with humanity.

As one who had affinity with humanity, Jesus also lived life and perfectly did what they could not do. Part of this is seen in the quotation from Isaiah 8. Jesus would perfectly trust in the LORD. No sinful human is capable of perfect trust in the Lord. Jesus, the backup, did what they could not do.

Jesus came to be the substitute in life for sinful humanity because of God's immense care and concern for them. The author of Hebrews notes a different relationship with humans than with angels. There were angels who rebelled against God. God did not have a plan to save them. Instead, he created hell as a place to punish them. Yet, humans rebelled against God and he had a plan to hold on to them. He sent his Son to take flesh to be their Savior. God had this plan to save them.

Since God in his mercy had a desire to save sinful humanity, it was necessary for the Son of God to share flesh and blood with them. He had to be like them in every way. That is what the Son of God did. He took flesh to live like humans do. He lived in a broken sinful world like humans do. He lived under the law

like humans do. He faced sufferings of many kinds like humans do. He became truly human in every way. He did this to be their substitute in life.

One of the ways that he was the same as humanity is he faced the suffering of being tempted to sin. He had to face the challenge of denying temptation. Later in Hebrews, the author explains to what extent Jesus faced this temptation, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are." (Hebrews 4:15) Every single temptation that is common to humanity was faced by Jesus. Now, the power of this statement comes from a portion of the verse that I have not yet quoted. This verse continues, "yet was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) Jesus the substitute faced the temptations that are common to humanity and overcame them. He did not fall into them. He did not sin. He did what humans could not do on their own. God took flesh to be the substitute for humanity. He is the substitute in life.

The author of Hebrews gives the final thought on this that it is because he suffered temptation in this way that he is able to help those who suffer temptation. He knows what they go through. Yet it is more than that. He suffered through the challenge of overcoming each and every temptation. He is the substitute in life that was needed by those who could not overcome temptation.

In sports, there are times the backup comes in because the starter is not capable of doing the job. Think of a cornerback in football. If the cornerback is getting burned by a wide receiver play after play after play, it may become time to simply take that cornerback out of the game and put in the backup. Keeping the first string guy in the game would be detrimental to him and the team.

Unfortunately, even in such cases, you will likely not bring in a more talented substitute. Jesus as substitute is a different story. Jesus is not the backup plan. Jesus is also vastly more talented and capable than sinful humanity. Therefore, Jesus came in as the substitute just as they needed.

As the substitute in life, Jesus is not just locking down a speedy wide receiver, instead, he overcame every single temptation to sin. He locked down temptations toward pride, unrighteous anger, jealousy, and all temptations that came his way.

Many people hold up as heroic when people refuse help so they can carry themselves through a situation. Do people perhaps think this is what they can and should do when it comes to spiritual adversity? Do they think they can waive off the substitute and stay in the game? This is impossible. Humanity's insufficiency is too great. By nature, you did not just have a spiritual deficiency. By nature, you were dead in your sin. People cannot waive off the sub, grin and bare it, and carry themselves to victory.

You may think you would never waive off Jesus from coming in as your substitute, but here is how many people do it: Instead of recognizing that they are completely incapable of doing this on their own, they lean toward self-reliance. They ask questions that sound good like; How will I do it better next time? Or how do I get better from here? You don't need a timeout to strategize. You need to be taken out of the game. You need a substitute in life.

As you are carted off the field, give the stadium a thumbs up because the substitute is here. Your substitute is the greatest player the league has ever seen. The best part about it is when you check the box score at the end of the game, you see his stats have been accredited to you. Therefore, the glory that is due to the substitute is given to you. As your substitute he played a Hall of Fame level career and you get the credit. Your name is written in the books. Your name will be called out. You will be inducted into the halls of Zion.

The Son of God also took on flesh so he could die for his brothers. We know that God cannot die. God is eternal. God is not mortal. God needed to take on flesh and blood so his flesh and blood could be the substitutionary sacrifice for mankind. The Son of God who became man and lived a perfect human life also went to a cross to suffer death.

Death is the punishment for sin. When humans rebelled against God, they brought on themselves the curse of death. Immediately, they died spiritually. Their bodies began to die. Eventually, they would die

physically. Ultimately, the punishment would result in eternal death in hell. Jesus took on this punishment through his death. On the cross, Jesus suffered the pangs of hell. Since he is God, his death was sufficient to forgive the sins of the whole world.

This substitutionary sacrifice is Jesus' priestly work. It was said to Aaron and his sons, "The Lord gave these directions to Aaron: You, your sons, and your father's house with you will bear the guilt for any sins in connection with the sanctuary. You and your sons with you will bear the guilt for any sins in connection with your priesthood." (Numbers 18:1) Aaron and his sons, the priests, would bear the guilt of the sins of the people. In a greater sense, Jesus bore the guilt of the sins of the whole world on the cross.

The result of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice is that humans were released from the fear of death. Jesus' death was the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. He took on himself the punishment. Those who look to Jesus do not need to fear death. Jesus destroyed the power of death and the one who holds its power, the devil.

You need someone else to take on the pain. Send in the substitute. This is like a 3rd down back in football. The 3rd down back comes in to take the pain of the big hits for the primary running back. This bruising back spares the primary running back from the hurt and harm. This is like what Jesus did for us in his substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus took the blows for us. Yet, in a far more serious way, Jesus took the pain of the punishment of all sins on the cross. Jesus is the substitute in death.

Do you fear that the pain of punishment is still coming your way? Maybe something in your gut says that you still need to be punished. Perhaps your load of guilty feelings tell you that your sins still need to be paid for. Sadly, there are many people out there that know Jesus died as the substitute, but they do not believe his death to be sufficient to pay for their sins. Are you one of them?

Jesus defeated the one who has the power over death by his own death. Jesus' atoning sacrifice was sufficient for the sins of all people of all time. That means it is sufficient for you as well. This is as the writer of Hebrews later states, "Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices on a daily basis, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. In fact, he sacrificed for sins once and for all when he offered himself." (Hebrews 7:27) Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice was enough for you. You do not need to fear death. You do not need to fear punishment.

The Progressive commercial campaign, "The Backup" is inaccurate. Life does have a substitute. Jesus the Son of God is your substitute in life and death. Jesus took flesh to live the perfect life that you could not. Jesus went to the cross for the punishment that you deserved. Now, you can rely on him your substitute. You do not need to rely on yourself. You do not need to fear the punishment for your sins. You can look to Jesus and say, "Send in the substitute." Amen.