

*Lyrics for His Life, Pt. 12*  
***A Priest Forever!***  
*Psalm 110: 1-4; Hebrews 4: 14-16*

**First Presbyterian Church  
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We're talking today about the *priesthood* of Christ. The title of priest for Jesus is not one we usually we think about. Yet Jesus as priest is deeply Biblical and vital for our daily life in Christ. Simply put, a priest is someone who represents God to humanity, and then represents humanity to God. The priest says, "This is who your God is and what he requires of you." The priest says, "O God, your people cry out their praise, they ask forgiveness and they need your merciful care in these ways." A priest is a connector. "People, here is your God. Listen to him. O God, these are your people, save them."

So Scripture tells us that Jesus is our great high priest. He shows us who the Father is. He offers the sacrifice of himself to open the way to his Father. In faith, we go with and through Jesus to the very presence of God. Why does this work? How can Jesus be the bridge between God and humanity? Because he who has been the Son of God from eternity once upon a time stepped into our world as one of us. The Son of God took up a real flesh and bone humanity as Jesus. And he keeps hold of that humanity forever. So he is truly God showing himself to us. And he is truly man offering himself back to his Father. As our Hebrews passage says, Jesus relates to us as a man who knows what it's like to live in this world. He wants us to come to him with every need. Jesus take us and our requests to the Father. Then Jesus brings the Father's reply by pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us in fuller measure. Our connector gives us grace to help in time of need.

Now we don't often think this way about Jesus. Especially about how his priesthood continues right now. In fact, through the years, Christ's people have sometimes focused so much on his divinity that we have forgotten how constantly and tenderly accessible he is to us.



Kathleen Madigan is a comedian who's also Catholic. She has a funny bit about the difference between Catholics and southern Protestants, and how surprising it was when she first encountered the likes of us. "They have a direct relationship with Jesus, and they speak of it that way. [They just talk right to Jesus] And I thought, Wow! Really? You

guys go straight to Jesus?? In the Catholic school I was given a laundry list of people to contact *before* Jesus—otherwise I'm *bothering* Jesus... You are going to call these people Kathleen, before you bother Jesus. Start with your guardian angel, he's got nothing to do twenty-four hours a day except tend to your needs. If he's not available, you can speak to the saint in charge of the activity you're upset about. You can speak to Jesus' mother if you'd like to. Give Mary a shout, but you are NOT to bother Jesus!"<sup>1</sup> 😊

Madigan good heartedly points out how in her Catholic tradition, we need a mediator between ourselves and Jesus. But in the Protestant tradition, Jesus *himself* is the mediator between God the Father and us. Being both God and man, divine and human, Jesus has the role of go-between. We don't need a priest or pastor or saint to get our prayers to Jesus. He loves to be the bridge and connector between us and the Father. We don't bother him when we go directly to Jesus. He lives for this communion!

During our series on *Lyrics for his Life*, we have focused on the humanity of Jesus. We've looked at how the psalms would give expression both to the meaning and emotions involved in the events of Jesus' life. The psalms gave Jesus a connection in prayer to his Father. And they give us a connection to the heart of Jesus. Today, as our series concludes, we'll look at a psalm through which Jesus affirms his divinity. Quoting from Psalm 110, Jesus identified himself as the special, eternal priest set aside by his Father. Are you ready for strange? This is the psalm most often quoted in the New Testament!

Three gospels record Jesus himself teaching from Psalm 110! Matthew's Gospel tells it this way, "Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them (referring to Ps.110), "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying," "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?" And no one was able to answer him a word... (Mt. 22: 41-46). Jesus took them straight to a mystery that had puzzled the Hebrew scholars for years. Who could this psalm be talking about? Who was higher than David, so high that he called him Almighty, yet someone to whom the LORD I AM could speak and make promises to?

**LORD= Yahweh=The Sacred Name of God**

First, we have to recall the difference between “LORD” and “Lord.” The all capital letters of LORD renders the four Hebrew letters that we translate as YHWH, pronounced Yahweh. This is the sacred name of the one true God, revealed to Moses in Exodus 3. The letters mean “I am who I am.” Pure being. Pure freedom and power. The LORD all caps is the great I Am. This is a holy and specific name.

### Lord=Adonai=A *Title* for the Almighty God

“Lord” in lower case letters renders the Hebrew word *Adonai*, a title of respect that can range in meaning from “sir” to an owner to the God who rules and reigns over all. Out of respect for the sacred name, the Hebrews might *see* the letters YHWH yet read aloud God’s title, Adonai, rather than actually say his name Yahweh. So sometimes the two words can be interchangeable. But not in Psalm 110!

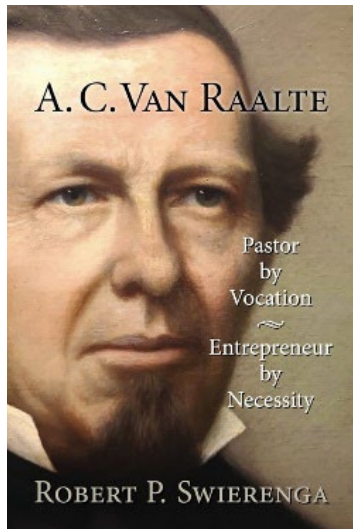
### The LORD (Yahweh) spoke to my Lord (Adonai)

Psalm 110 begins by using both terms, as if two distinct persons were having a conversation. David writes that the LORD, Yahweh, says to my Lord, Adonai. This flips the circuit breakers in my mind! Wait. Who’s speaking? David is the author of this psalm. So David records a conversation he heard. The eternal God was speaking to someone whom David called his Lord? But David was the king! No human being was higher than David. So who could be King David’s Lord? Perhaps some future king in David’s line through whom the LORD I AM would exercise full and flourishing reign over not just Israel but the whole earth. And yet, how could the LORD be speaking to this future king if he had not yet come to be?

How God’s people must have puzzled over this psalm before Jesus came! For it seems that the LORD speaks to another divine being, one who is alive now but will in the future come to reign next to the LORD and see all his enemies subdued.

### A Priest Like Melchizedek!

And there is still more mystery to come. The LORD next *swears* a promise to this Lord. He is not only a king, but he is also a priest. But this Lord in Psalm 110 is not a usual priest of Israel, someone descended through Aaron the first priest and his son Levi. No, this lordly priest, already alive in heaven, “is after the order of Melchizedek.” Melchizedek is a mysterious figure that appears very briefly in Genesis 14. There we read that Melchizedek was both a priest of God *and* the king



of Salem in Abraham's time. After a battle, Abraham gave tithes of the victory spoils to Melchizedek, as if he were making an offering to the LORD himself. And Melchizedek gave Abraham bread and wine, entering personal communion with him. He blessed Abraham in the name of God Most High, and blessed God for subduing Abraham's enemies. Salem means *peace*, and Salem became Jerusalem, the city of the LORD.

Let's put all that together. Psalm 110 directs us to a mighty king who brings peace, a priest who offers bread and wine and blessing. He already exists and yet is coming. He will share rule with the I AM himself. Remind

you of anyone?

I know this swirls our minds. But I share it with you because we need to realize the depth of the person of Jesus. To know him rightly, we need to see how Jesus alone pulls all the threads of Scripture together. He is our savior. He is our Lord. He is also our priest who offered the perfect sacrifice to God: himself on the cross. He also continues in the role of priest, connecting God and humanity.

There, at the Father's right hand he prays for us. This means the Father, Son and Spirit continue to talk about us. To regard us. To see us. To want more for us. To be active in forming us as new creations. Jesus wants us with him. He wants to transform all that separates us from the joy of deep communion with his Father.

This is no easy task. We are deep rooted in our strategies for living without needing God. We have deep patterns of coping with pain that may be destructive. We have deep habits of relating to others that cause harm. We love our sins. Our imaginations are shrunken. Our faith in the new creation to come is thin. We get plagued with fears for the future. We anticipate the worst and that shrinks our hearts. We have only sporadic interest in participating in Christ's mission to the world with the hope of the gospel. We need someone who labors on our behalf to bring us along in heart, body and mind to become what he has died to make available to us. We need our great high priest every hour.

My great, great grandfather Albertus Van Raalte was a Dutch pastor. In 1846-47, he led a colony from the Netherlands to America and founded what is now Holland Michigan. His life had been shaped by a profound experience in his early twenties. A cholera epidemic broke out in the city of Leiden where Van Raalte attended

university. More than 500 people died that summer. Van Raalte himself contracted the disease and lay close to death. In that state, he had a profound spiritual awakening as he was reading the book of Romans. He records,

When I saw that God was united with man through Jesus the crucified, I was absorbed in peace, joy, and love, and then I received my purpose in life...A fire burned inside me, from which my first and serious prayer to God welled: ‘O God, spare my life, so that I can preach to my poor fellow human beings that You are, that You care about us, and that You invite the fallen ones to find righteousness and eternal life in Jesus.’

His biographer comments that “This confession became the hallmark of his preaching: God exists, God cares, God saves.”<sup>2</sup>

Van Raalte discovered the priesthood of Jesus. He is not bothered by us. Jesus the Son of God joined himself to our humanity. He remains fully God and fully man. So he is our priest, our mediator, our connector. Jesus represents the very heart of his Father to us: O God, you exist, you care and you invite us fallen ones into eternal life. He cares because he has walked our dusty roads and lived the burden of life in this world. And he does not stop being united to what we are. Jesus is our continuing priest and savior. We don’t bother him. He wants us to come to him. So hear again the words we read from Hebrews:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 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. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 2: 14-15).

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Madigan, “Bothering Jesus,” 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUP2QjlfhY8>.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Swierenga, *A.C. Van Raalter: Pastor by Vocation, Entrepreneur by Necessity* (Holland, MI: Van Raalte Press, 2023), p. 38.