

# "How Does It Fit?"

Text: Hebrews 2:10-18

God grant that the celebration of the birth of the Baby in the manger in Bethlehem would continue to provide each of you with peace and comfort throughout the coming year. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, I wonder just how many times the question that serves as our sermon theme for this morning ("*How does it fit?*") was asked during the last few days. It's probably the gift-givers second greatest fear, right after "*Do you like it?*" and right before "*Do you already have one?*" Disappointing to put so much thought and effort into a gift, only to blow it by getting the wrong size.

And the question applies to more than just clothes, doesn't it? It also applies to taste and style, as in: "*Do you think that is something that you will ever use, that bar of stainless steel soap I got you?*" (And yes, I really did mean to write "bar of stainless steel soap." Don't ask.)

There are in life certain things that just don't fit – in a variety of different ways and for a variety of different reasons – which doesn't mean there is anything necessarily wrong with the gift itself. It just doesn't work well with someone's size, style, or taste.

Our text on this Sunday after Christmas raises much the same question in that it talks about something "fitting" that absolutely seems ill-suited, inappropriate or just out of place. And yet since God's inspired Word labels it as "fitting," our job will not be to question if it is so, but to gain insights by learning how such a thing is, in fact, fitting.

Our text is found in the Book of Hebrews, the Second Chapter:

*<sup>ESV</sup> Hebrews 2:10-18 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. <sup>11</sup> For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, <sup>12</sup> saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." <sup>13</sup> And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." <sup>14</sup> ¶ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. <sup>16</sup> For surely it*

*is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. <sup>17</sup> Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*

These are God's words. God grant that each of us might rightly respect and highly regard these words, receiving them with both complete trust and sincere thanksgiving. Asking our God to work powerfully in our hearts through the study of these his words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us through Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Did you catch the apparent problem when you read through this morning's text? What was it that our text labeled as "fitting" that seemed initially to be grossly inappropriate or misguided? The statement, boiled down to its simplest form, was this: "**For it was fitting that he (God the Father) should make the founder of their salvation (his Son Jesus) perfect through suffering.**"

Again, the obvious question, "*How does that fit?*" How could it possibly be thought of as "**fitting**" that God the Father made his perfect, holy, trusting Son "**perfect through suffering**"? Doesn't that seem just *wrong* somehow – especially when we are talking about Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God? How could Jesus have ever lacked *anything*? And how could that lack be supplied by suffering?

Our text goes on to explain that the suffering that Jesus endured was for our sakes, not his. God's explanation is found at the end of our text: "**Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. <sup>18</sup> For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.**" In God's infinite wisdom, Jesus had to suffer the same things that you and I suffer so that he could relate to and sympathize with those he came to serve and to save.

What sort of pain and suffering? It is obviously foolish to think of Jesus' affliction as restricted to Holy Week with the soldiers, the crown of thorns, the crucifixion, and so on. There was undoubtedly much more. Did Jesus, for example, have back pain? Did he suffer from pinched nerves, toothaches, headaches, the flu, or colds? Did he have scars from his early work with wood or stone? Jesus probably suffered from all of these things and more. Remember that Holy Scripture says in

Hebrews 4:15, **"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."** The suffering of Jesus was every bit as bad as our own suffering, and more. He was tired, thirsty, and hungry. He wept, grieved, and was frustrated. In fact Isaiah 53 tells us, **"He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."**

All of this is intended to provide us with two things: a greater appreciation for our Savior and insight into the suffering we see all around us – and experience in our own lives. The inevitable question seems always to be, "Why?" Why did Jesus have to suffer? Why is there pain and suffering at all in this world? Why doesn't our merciful, all-powerful God in heaven spare us, his true children, from pain, hardship, and heartache? The world, in fact, turns this question around and uses it as proof that God does not exist, or at best that he lacks power or control over the events in our lives. They reason that a *merciful* God would not allow his beloved children to suffer; therefore one of two things must be true. Either God does not exist at all, or God does not have the power to spare us from pain and misery. Such is the logic of the godless.

But then again it's not just the godless, is it? Have you ever felt that God was far away or ignoring you during times of suffering in your own life? Emotional and physical pain has a way of changing us. It can cause us to do and think and act as we never thought we could or would. What God intends as a test of faith and for the strengthening thereof, we routinely turn into a failure and into something sinful and rebellious – even blasphemous.

It is necessary then, as we stand at the beginning of yet another year on earth, that we look ahead realistically and plan accordingly. We all have a tendency to think, or at least hope, that tomorrow is going to be better somehow. Such hope is what the world needs to survive, but the Christian ought to be realistic. There is suffering and pain ahead for all of us - physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. How do we know this? Jesus said so: **"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."** (John 16:33)

Since we know that trials and suffering of all kinds are waiting for us if God chooses to extend our lives, we try to prepare by answering *now* some of the questions that will certainly come *later*. (Or maybe you are struggling with these questions even now.) The first question we need to answer is, "Why is there suffering at all?" The answer comes in understanding *how suffering fits* into the life of the child of God.

The answer begins with another question: "What do we imagine that we deserve?" All pain and misery was brought into this world by man – by us – not by God. The basic cause of suffering is sin. In the sinless Garden of Eden there was none of the misery that we see now. The curse came to man only when man disobeyed and destroyed the perfection of God's creation. Pain ought then to remind the Christian of our own sin problem. To answer our question "What do we deserve?" we must answer that we deserve much *worse* than we will ever receive. Because of sin, God would have been perfectly justified in bringing to every single man, woman, and child a life of misery and pain, from birth to death, followed by an eternity in hell. Because of our sin, we deserve nothing better, in this life or the next. Nor do we dare imagine that we have earned something, spiritually or materially, because we have experienced the results of sin in this earth because of our affliction. It is a heathen notion to imagine that God will reward (with heaven) all who suffer on this earth.

Here again we gain a new measure of respect and admiration for our Savior Jesus. Jesus knew what heaven was like - sinless, painless, perfectly blissful. Yet he chose to leave that perfection and to be born into a world of sin and misery. Imagine how Jesus felt as he endured pain and heartache as a human being. We justly deserve to suffer for our sins. Jesus had no sin. He placed himself into this world of hurt so that we might never have to suffer the far greater agony of hell. So also our text tells us that **"he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."**

There is also a second reason why or how suffering fits in our lives, even in connection with God's own children. Imagine if there were no such thing as pain or discomfort of any kind here on earth. Who then would be interested in a Savior? Hard to imagine anyone who would be thinking in terms of a rescuer, since we would have no great desire for heaven and we would have no fear of hell. Why, in a painless world, would we have been interested in a life after this life? Then too, how could we fear hell, the place of torment and agony, if we had no concept of what pain and suffering were all about? Hell would hold no terror, and our old Adam could never be subdued. Jesus would be of no interest to us in a painless world, and the result would invariably be that our first taste of suffering would be the ultimate, unending torment of hell. We had to first experience suffering before we could possess a fear of pain and death, and therefore before we could even recognize our desperate need for a Savior. So we read in our text that **"by his**

***death (Jesus) might... deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."***

There is still more to understand about how suffering fits into God's plan for our salvation. We have God's promise that it is through suffering on the outside that we learn to grow straight on the inside. Children do not learn the lessons they need to learn only through patient pleading. Pain is a powerful teacher. Certainly only a monster would punish his child just to make him feel pain. Christian chastisement is done out of love and with a purpose. That purpose is ***"to bring up a child in the way he should go."*** So it is with our Heavenly Father. He allows hard lessons for many reasons - all of them good. He uses suffering to strengthen our faith, to draw us closer to himself, and to draw others to him through our patient acceptance of his will. What comfort our text holds out to us as we struggle to accept and *thank* our God for what he has chosen to allow into our lives. Our text tells us that the same Jesus who once suffered ***"is able to aid those who are tempted."*** During those hard time, what a great comfort to know that Jesus has been there. He knows exactly what we are going through, and he speaks to God the Father as our friend and ally.

Understand, finally, that hardship helps to keep us focused. The end is in sight. Suffering helps to insure that we never ***"love the world, nor the things in the world."*** Such a God-pleasing focus would be nearly impossible in a painless, trouble-free world. Our Lord loves us too much to allow that to happen.

In the end it is *our* deficiency, *our* need, *our* lack of focus and consistency that makes earthly suffering a necessity for God's children. The fault does not rest with our merciful God but with us. He is the loving Father, we are the wandering children.

Remember finally that Jesus suffered only until his death on the cross. Though he once suffered, he suffers no more. The greatest comfort is here to be found, for God has promised all believers that we will rise just as Christ was raised. At that time, because of what Jesus has done for us, we will leave behind forever all that is painful, frustrating, evil, and difficult, and we will enjoy forever the full and complete perfection of heaven. May God the Holy Spirit preserve each one of us in and through life's trials until that great day; protecting us in the days and years to come, until that great day when Jesus himself returns to take us home. In the meantime, God grant that we recognize in hardship the loving hand of our Savior-God, and grant us the faith and humility not only to bear up under it, but to actually thank him for it. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

ESV **Exodus 13:1-15** The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine." <sup>3</sup> ¶ Then Moses said to the people... <sup>11</sup> ¶ "When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your fathers, and shall give it to you, <sup>12</sup> you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your animals that are males shall be the LORD's. <sup>13</sup> Every firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. Every firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. <sup>14</sup> And when in time to come your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you shall say to him, 'By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. <sup>15</sup> For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.'

ESV **Luke 2:22-24, 39-40** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." <sup>39</sup> ¶ And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Sunday after Christmas – December 27, 2015**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 712 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Child Is This"

## The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Exodus 13:1-15) We recognize the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament as that which pointed to and found fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus. So also in this reading the dedication of the firstborn pointed to the great "once for all" sacrifice of God's Son as payment for all sin, God the Father himself dedicating his Son for the salvation of mankind.

**The Second Lesson:** (Luke 2:22-24, 39-40) Jesus had good parents. As such they did all that was required of good, God-fearing parents – here bringing Jesus to the temple at the prescribed time and offering the prescribed sacrifice. Jesus went on to keep every commandment perfectly. Having then kept every single law, he served as our perfect sin offering.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 710 (Verses 1-2) (Brown Hymnal)

"Once in Royal David's City"

## The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 2:10-18 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"How Does It Fit?"

## The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

## The Installation of the 2016 Church Council

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 288 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Help Us Ever to Retain"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

## The Distribution -Hymn 108 (Red Hymnal)

## The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 710 (Verses 3-4) (Brown Hymnal)

"Once in Royal David's City"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

**Attendance** - Sunday (51) Average (49) Thursday (77) Friday (32)

## This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>- No midweek classes</b>	
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship/coffee time

**CLC News** – Pastor-emeritus Arvid Gullerud, one of the founding members of the CLC, was called home to his Savior's side on December 18. Nominations are being accepted for three different positions at Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire: a fulltime maintenance worker, a professor to replace retiring Professor John Pfeiffer, and the position of CLC Treasurer to replace Dr. James Sydow, who has announced his pending retirement. For further information on any or all of these positions, please see the Pastor.

**Organ Fund Update** – Our Organ Fund has now received \$11,495 in donations, which means we are a little over half way to our goal of \$22,100. Although our current organ is still more or less functional, we appear to be living on borrowed time. The Council will soon be making the final decision on which organ we will purchase, and the actual order date will depend on financing.

**This Week's Schedule** – Please note that no midweek classes have been scheduled for this week, but we return to our normal schedule next Sunday, with Sunday School and Bible Class at 9am and Sunday worship at 10am. Midweek Confirmation and Bible Study resume on January 6.

**Church Installation** – The 2016 Church Council is scheduled to be installed during the service this morning. The Council members are: Mike McEnroe-Pres., Ron Hoskins - VP, Fred Adams – Treas., Mark Johnson – Sec., Gary Miller – Fin. Sec., and Brian Fettig – Trustee Coordinator.