

December 28, 2025

1st Sunday of Christmas
Merciful and Faithful
Hebrews 2:10-18

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I entered life with the great advantage of having an older sibling. Because whether he wanted to or not, my older brother was always the first to do everything. Maybe if you're an older sibling, you can sympathize with my brother's pain. I'm sure I was pretty annoying because I followed in his footsteps for as long as I could. I had the same teachers as he did from kindergarten to high school. I went to the same summer camp as my brother. I enrolled in the same college as him. I even joined the same fraternity. I can't begin to count the number of times he rescued me as a pledge. A lot of people don't like being compared to their older siblings, but I thought it was great! It made things easier for me when it was my turn because someone had already gone before me. Like if you've ever watched the Tour de France, the riders tend to travel in a line, and the rider in the front is the one who works the hardest because he's the one who has to face the wind. Everyone else drafts behind the leader because they want to get all the benefits of his effort. It's nice to have a little bit of help. Older siblings can do that for us.

We all share an older sibling, of course. His name is Adam – the pinnacle of God's act of creation in the book of Genesis:

“then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.”^a

And the story goes on to say that Adam, our brother, and Eve, our sister, would walk in the garden together with God in the cool of the day. These human creatures were created out of love to bear God's image in the world - to share in everlasting communion with God. God wanted them to grow and grow into the fullness of His good intention for humanity, to share the good gifts of creation with one another, and to seek the wholeness that God enjoys in the perfect community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But we know the story well enough to remember that a day came when God could not find our brother, Adam, or our sister, Eve. God cried out, “where are you?”, but our elder siblings hid themselves from God because they were ashamed. Rather than flourish there in the garden as God desired, they instead wandered from God's side. And where our elder siblings went before us, there we followed in their way. We, too, wandered from God's side. We began to see our brothers and sisters not as family, but as enemies. The good gifts which God intended us to share, we kept instead for ourselves. We isolated ourselves from one another and from God. We became lost and alone; broken and bewildered. Ashamed, just as we were in the garden.

^a Genesis 2:7-8

April and I have been watching the latest season of Stranger Things on Netflix. And if you haven't seen it, it's about these kids in the 1980s who have to keep saving their town from some weird supernatural monsters. And without spoiling it for you, I think I can tell you that, in the latest episode that I saw, the conflict gets resolved when one of the characters discovers that he has magical powers within himself. It's the classic hero narrative. I can do anything I put my mind to. I've got all the power. Like my favorite Disney movie, Hercules, or the classic sci-fi movie, the Matrix, or even Shawshank Redemption if you want to stretch it. Hero stories.

We love these stories! We like the idea that we've got all the strength inside of us that we'll ever need. We don't need anyone else to solve our problems or save our town. We can do it all by ourselves! This is a great message about positive self-regard and good self-esteem. Those are good things, really and truly, they are.

But what happens when we come up against something that we can't defeat on our own? Well, as it turns out, there is something that we're powerless to defeat. Our text for this morning says that this great enemy is death and, more specifically, our fear of it.

The author of Hebrews says that we human beings are in a state of bondage. That we're enslaved to the fear of death. When they left the garden, that's where our elder siblings led us... out of paradise and into slavery to the fear of death. How can we break free? Try as we might, we can't do it alone. We need help. And that's ok. In fact, that's more than ok. Because God does not create us to be alone. God creates us for communion... communion with him and communion with one another. Where we deviate from this communion, thinking that we can do it all ourselves, we begin to lose our way.

But God is not content to leave us alone. In fact, when we lost our way, he left his lofty throne and took on our flesh in order to rescue us. Where Adam failed, God himself succeeded. In Jesus Christ, the greater *Adam*, God sent to us a far better elder brother to lead us out of bondage and into freedom. There's a great little illustration in one of the old commentaries that talks about the way Jesus comes to us in our time of great need. It says, it's like we're in a sinking ship, all of humanity, but Jesus is there with us, and "He is the strong swimmer who carries the rope ashore and so not only secures His own position but makes rescue for all who will follow." He has himself opened the way of access to God.^b

In him, there is no shame. All our failures, he consumes, as he leads us, his brothers and sisters, back to our Father who loves us. Our text says,

"He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, 'I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise...'

But then the text goes on to say why he calls us brothers. It says,

"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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

^b Interpreter's Commentary – Hebrews Expository Commentary

Sam Bush, episcopal priest, tells the story of a good friend who had joined a recovery group. He says,

“When he first joined... he was given the phone number of a sponsor to call, even though they had never met. And in a moment of weakness, he calls this man in Richmond in the middle of the night. And the guy picks up. They talk for two hours. [His] friend said, he can’t remember anything this man said, except for two words: ‘Me too.’ He says that conversation... saved his life...”^c

Jesus is like that. “Me too.” In every way, God in Christ shares our situation. Last Wednesday night was Christmas Eve. And on that night, we came together and we celebrated the coming of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, which means *God is with us*. In every weakness, in every struggle, in every fit of grief, in every moment of disappointment, the God of the universe says, “me too.” He’s right here with us. We’re not alone.

This is the mystery of the incarnation. In Sunday School last week, Matt was teaching our class, and he directed us to the book of Hebrews. And specifically, he helped us unpack of the reality of the incarnation. What does it mean for Jesus, the Son of God, to take on human flesh? What does it mean for Jesus to have been fully human? Why does it matter that, as Hebrews puts it, Jesus shares our flesh and blood? Max Lucado muses over this mystery in one of his books when he says,

“Angels watched as Mary changed God’s diaper. The universe watched with wonder as The Almighty learned to walk. Children played in the street with him. And had the synagogue leader known who was listening to his sermons...”

“Jesus may have had pimples. He may have been tone-deaf. Perhaps a girl down the street had a crush on him or vice-versa. It could be that his knees were bony. One thing’s for sure: He was, while completely divine, completely human.”

“For thirty-three years he would feel everything you and I have ever felt. He felt weak. He grew weary. He was afraid of failure... He got colds, burped, and had body odor. His feelings got hurt. His feet got tired. And his head ached.”

“To think of Jesus in such a light is ... not something we like to do; it’s uncomfortable. It is much easier to keep the humanity out of the incarnation. Clean the manure from around the manger. Wipe the sweat out of his eyes. Pretend he never snored or blew his nose or hit his thumb with a hammer.”^d

In a few minutes, we’ll sing *Away in a Manger*. And it’s got this silly line that says, “the little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.” But that’s just silly. Of course, Jesus cried. He was a baby.

Why does it matter? Why does God need to be human? St. Gregory of Nazianzus famously states that, “What has not been assumed cannot be restored.”^e ... “What has not been assumed cannot be restored.” In other words, in order to save human beings, God had to become

^c [The Mockingpulpit: “When Jesus Failed the Duck Test” - Sam Bush](#)

^d Max Lucado, *God Came Near: Chronicles of the Christ* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1987), 26

^e George H. Guthrie, *The NIV Application Commentary: Hebrews*, 118

a human being. To undo human rebellion, God had to become the true human. “Me too,” says Jesus. “Me too.”

But if that is where it ends, then is it enough? God in Christ comes down to be with us. This is the miracle of Christmas. I’m with them, says Jesus. I’m on the side of the broken. I’m not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. But is it enough?

One of the early church Fathers, a guy by the name of Irenaeus, writes of Adam and Jesus... of the tree that bore the tempter’s fruit and of the tree that formed the cross. He says,

“So the Lord now manifestly came to his own, and, born by his own created order which he himself bears, he by his obedience on the tree (meaning the cross) renewed what was done by disobedience in a tree (meaning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil)... Then indeed the sin of the first-formed man was amended by the chastisement of the First-begotten, the wisdom of the serpent was conquered by the simplicity of the dove, and the chains were broken by which we were in bondage to death... Because of this the Lord also declares himself to be the Son of Man, so renewing in himself that primal man from whom the formation [of man] by woman began, that as our race went down to death by a man who was conquered we might ascend again to life by a man who overcame... ”^f

If all he did was come to be with us, it would surely have changed the world. But Jesus did not stop at the incarnation. He took his human body, with all its weakness, together with all the brokenness and shame of all the world, and he nailed it to the cross. In the cross, Jesus comes to do what Adam or you or I could not. He comes to take us from slavery to freedom, from estrangement to communion, from fear to faithfulness, and from death to new and everlasting life. He comes to return us to the Father.

“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.”

Our brother, our high priest, offers himself in our place. Not only “Me too,” says Jesus, but “me instead.” Merry Christmas. Amen.

^f Irenaeus' Against Heresies – part of *Early Christian Fathers* edited by Cyril C. Richardson, 389-391