

HEBREWS 5:1-10
THE GO-BETWEEN

It's dark; it's a night-time shot, as the camera pans across the city. The city is in darkness and you can just see the outlines of the buildings for which the city is famous. There's the temple, the city wall, the governor's palace. We're in the days before street lights; there are a few houses where the curtains are not yet drawn and little bits of light shine out into the street. There are a few knots of people with their lamps gathering on the street corners or making their way home from the temple, home to have a meal, put the children to bed, settle down for the night. The camera keeps panning across the city and begins to focus in on the garden in the middle of the city; we can see some olive trees reflected in the moonlight and a few pricks of light underneath the trees tell us that there are some people in the garden; what are they doing there at this time of night? Surely it is a dangerous place to be. As the camera focuses right down we see that some of these people are asleep, but there is a single figure on his own, kneeling, and as his face is revealed through the darkness, we see that face wreathed in agony, His lips moving silently.

We're in Gethsemane and that single figure on His own is Jesus; He has come out into the garden with His friends, but they've all fallen asleep. He is praying and there is agony written across His face because He is wrestling with His destiny, a destiny that is about to be decided before He leaves the garden that night. Events around Him are threatening: His enemies are circling round Him; He has a deep sense of the mission of God, the reason for which He has come. His enemies, His mission, are all suggesting that death is on the cards, that He is about to suffer and die and so He prays: "*Father...*" (Luke 22:42) Part of Him wants to run away, but the other part of Him knows that He needs to stay, to see this through to the bitter end; it needs to be that way because He is God's servant and He has come to serve us. The rest, as they say, is history; Jesus stays, is crucified and on the third day is raised and is the Saviour of the world forever. Gethsemane was the place where that was settled.

We are made for relationship with God; it is part of our DNA, spiritually. What we do here this morning is an expression of that relationship. But that is so often an uneasy relationship on our part. Something inside us knows that God is a good idea and that we should have this relationship and it should be better, but there is something else in us that leaves us unsettled. It is an uneasy relationship and there are two main reasons for that unease: firstly, God is so big, indeed God is so holy, pure and perfect in our understanding and these qualities of God make us stay away, make us want to keep our distance from God, so we're not sure what a relationship with this God would look like. Secondly, we are so sinful, our lives are so messy, full of faults and mistakes and so many other things that get in the way of even thinking about God; we're not sure what we'd bring to that relationship anyway. We may not put it in these terms, but the bigness of God and the messiness of our lives, make any notion of relationship so uneasy, so difficult, and something we just can't contemplate.

We need an intermediary; someone who will make it work from both sides. In 1989, the Reay Church, in Caithness, where I was minister, celebrated the 250th anniversary of the building. We had embarked on a major restoration project on the building, and had been out of it for four months while a new roof, new harling, new doors and windows were being worked on. We were back into the building at the start of August, the wedding of the daughter of an elder was the first event in the newly restored church. We also wanted to rededicate the building after doing so much work on it. The Queen Mother spent August in Caithness; through the offices of the Lord Lieutenant of the county, word came to us that if we held this service in August, the Queen Mother would be delighted to attend and through him we replied

saying that would be fine! Someone acted as the go-between to create this relationship for this particular event and she came and we celebrated and that was great. We take that idea into the much larger question of our relationship with God - we need someone to be the go-between!

Hebrews 5 is all about who goes between God and us! Hebrews is a sermon to Christians who grew up as Jews and who had the whole Old Testament in their background. So when he talks about 'high priests' his audience knows exactly what he's talking about. They are back in the world of temple and worship and people bringing offerings and sacrifices as part of their worship, but they can't offer these sacrifices on their own because God is too big, too holy and they are too sinful. There were priests appointed to take the people's offerings and bring them to God in worship. There was one, the High priest, and he was even allowed into the most holy place, the place where God was said to live amongst His people, only once in the year and he had to take an animal sacrifice with him. When He stood in the most holy place, in the presence of God, he was not only there for himself, but he was there for the whole people, their names written on his priestly garments; he was standing there as the go-between, the one through whom God's relationship with His people and the people's relationship with God would flow.

"Every high..." "God said..." (Hebrews 5:1,5f) Jesus embodied this relationship even in Himself. He was, at one and the same time, a fully human being and the Son of God. We struggle to understand how this is possible and the church has come up with formulations and creeds to explain and describe that relationship. The Bible simply describes what it sees as the reality and lives in the world of that tension. Jesus is a fully human being and so is one of us; He is able to represent us in matters relating to God. Jesus is also the Son of God and so is able to represent God in this relationship too. Jesus is perfectly placed to be the go-between, the One who acts as intermediary. He understands us and our world; He knows what human nature is like because He has lived in our neighbourhood, has walked our streets, has shared our emotions, has tasted our sorrows and sufferings. He also knows God: the Son of God shares everything that is true about God. He stands between.

Not only that, but we go back to Gethsemane. *"During the..." (Hebrews 5:7ff)* Have you ever agonised over a decision that you've needed to make? You see the pros of making the choice that you see to be good, but you also see the cons and you're not sure; you're torn in both directions. That's Jesus in Gethsemane: He sees the deep need to complete the mission of God, but that will mean suffering and the cross; something in Him that expresses the desire to run away - *"take this cup from me!"* - so what will He do? He learned a new level of obedience to God in Gethsemane, learning to do what God wants in a new, tougher place; this is a new level of obedience that will take Him to the cross on the very next day. In doing that He has become the source of salvation for us; He represents us to God, He prays for us, He brings our need, our sin to God and God forgives. God blesses us; God loves us in a new way; God promises all kinds of good things to us; the relationship is restored by Jesus on the cross; He is the ultimate go-between.

Listen to this and pick up the rhythm: *"He was..." (Isaiah 53:5,6)* This is Jesus, the go-between. This uneasy relationship, because God is too big, too holy and we are too sinful, needs to be properly repaired. We can't just paper over the cracks because they would just burst again. It needs to be properly repaired and Isaiah describes how that happens. God is too holy; we are too sinful. *"Our transgressions... our iniquities...our wandering off... our waywardness..."* - this is Bible's way of describing the real mess of our lives, and really goes to the heart of our human nature and how we go wrong. It is these that create our unease. But the

whole rhythm of Isaiah 53 is about Jesus taking these on Himself: "*He was...*" (Isaiah 53:5,6) there is a fantastic rhythm in this writing that makes it clear just how our relationship with God has been restored: everything that makes us feel uneasy from our corner is taken away and all that makes us feel uneasy about God is overcome and all of that is done by Jesus when He died on the cross and was raised from the dead.

There is something in us that needs relationship with God. Even in our secular world, people still have a sense of God; we may not call it that, but that's what it is. Still, people come asking questions: something makes us come looking for God, looking for something in life that satisfies that longing. It may also be that we've been sitting here for years, enjoying worship but not entirely sure about this relationship with God idea. We enjoy church, but we've never resolved the 'God-question'. It is part of our DNA as human beings that we are made for relationship with God; there is part of us that is made for doing business with God and either we listen to that and follow it, or as many people do, we simply ignore it. We will be poorer for ignoring it and our world, our society, our culture will be poorer when we ignore our relationship with God.

This uneasy relationship is resolved. God who is too big and too holy has come into our world; Jesus is the Son of God. We, whose lives are too sinful and too messy, are new people in Jesus; He has taken away our sin and we are forgiven people, new people and people whom God loves in a new way. We meet for worship in Jesus' name; we pray in Jesus' name; we serve others in Jesus' name; worship, prayer, and service are all expressions of our relationship with God. Jesus stands at the centre of that relationship: He is the go-between, the intermediary, the mediator; Jesus is one of us, who represents us; Jesus is the Son of God, come to complete the mission of God in the world. He is the source of salvation. The relationship is mended and for faith in Jesus we are a people loved, forgiven, greatly blessed.