

“The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.”

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

As most of our members are aware, we have spent the past few weeks reviewing the church’s teaching on *Confession and the Office of the Keys*. These two things go together, as Confession leads us to repentance and the Office of the Keys focuses on the church’s work of forgiving sins. When we confess, we are open to the wonderful promise that comes in the Absolution through the promise of Christ Himself or, as John says it: *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

(1 John 1:8–9, ESV)

We also talked about the way that the church carries out the Office of the Keys through God’s gift of pastors. While it wasn’t my intention to continue to talk about pastors, the text from Hebrews does provide us a continuation that I believe is important. This text speaks to us of the priests (or pastors) of the Old Testament in contrast with the perfect priesthood of Christ. Blessed is the church which finds a good and faithful pastor to shepherd the flock. Yet we know that all earthly pastors are going to be imperfect, especially if we see them in contrast to the way someone once described the perfect pastor. It may be a bit dated, but you’ll get the idea:

The perfect pastor preaches exactly 20 minutes, then sits down. He condemns sin, but never hurts anyone's feelings. He works from 8 am to 10 pm in every type of work, from preaching to custodial service. He makes \$60 a week, wears good clothes, buys good books regularly, has a nice family, drives a good car, and gives \$30 a week to the church. He also contributes to every good cause that comes around. He is 26 years old, and has been preaching for 30 years. He is tall and short, thin and heavy set, and handsome. He has one blue eye and one brown. His hair is parted down the middle—one side dark and straight, the other brown and wavy. He has a burning desire to work with youth and spends all his time with older folk. He spends all his time with a straight face because he has a sense of humour that keeps him seriously devoted to his work. He makes fifteen calls a day on church members, spends all his time evangelizing the unchurched, and is never out of the office.

I don't know of any pastors who meet those standards. For that matter, I really don't know any pastors, myself included who truly meet the biblical qualifications of a pastor. St Paul said: *“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”* (1 Timothy 3:1–7, ESV)

We may see these qualities in many pastors, and yet none of us are perfect. There was a time when people held pastors in respect and reverence. But today, more people tend to think of clergyman as money hungry, power hungry, uncaring individuals who are only out to serve themselves, not the people of the church. People think of pastors in terms of the clergymen who have sexually abused young boys. They think of pastors like Jimmy Swaggart, who was caught in the company of a prostitute. They think of pastors the way they are portrayed in tv shows—a bit silly, not all that bright, and not always with it.

Pastors aren't perfect—but they also aren't as bad as they are often made out to be. Like all the people of the church, they are

sinners. Our text reminds us that all of the priests of the past had to offer sacrifices for their own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ***For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests***, our text says. We pastors make mistakes, just like everyone else. We have our strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else. We face the same temptations and struggle with them, just like everyone else. And we need forgiveness, just like everyone else. That is why we all—pastors and people—need the ministry of the only perfect pastor, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the perfect pastor. Our text says: ***For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.*** He doesn't sin like other pastors. He doesn't have the weaknesses or make the mistakes of other pastors. He does have all the qualities we would expect of the perfect pastor. He is a great preacher, who speaks God's word with wisdom and authority. He teaches us that Word in its truth and purity, for He Himself is God. He is a caring, concerned pastor of His people. We saw that in our Gospel lesson, as that poor, blind beggar Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is drawing near. We are told: ***“And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** (Mark 10:47, ESV) Many of the people around him told him to be quiet. Yet he kept shouting ***“Son of David, have mercy on me!”*** (Mark 10:48, ESV) What does Jesus do? He stops, asks what he needs and when Bartimaeus asks to regain his sight, Jesus assures him: ***“Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way.*** (Mark 10:52, ESV)

We see this repeated again and again in the ministry of Jesus. He deals with people in all their times of hurt and need, giving Himself to serve His people even to the point of exhaustion. In Christ, we have a pastor who gives us the comfort we need in our moments of sorrow or fear, as He assures us of His love and of His power to help and save His people. In Christ, we have a pastor who not only announces that we are forgiven, but who is the very source of our forgiveness. As our text says: ***He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.*** He gives Himself as the perfect Sacrifice—as the ***“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”*** (John 1:29, ESV) He gives Himself for His people in the greatest act of ministry, dying in our place upon the cross, and then overcoming death itself in His glorious resurrection to continue to minister to His people.

My dear people, loved by God, that perfect pastor still ministers among us. He is with us now, still speaking to us through the words of Scripture. He is with us, surrounding us with His love and care. He is with us, to help, encourage and strengthen His people. But He also ministers through the under-shepherds or pastors He has given to the church. As we learn through the Holy Spirit's words to St. Paul: ***“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*** (Ephesians 4:11-16, ESV)

The only Perfect Pastor gives pastors to the church, to help God's people grow in their faith and life. He knows that every pastor—each and every one of us—works in weakness and imperfection but we work through the help and strength of the Holy Spirit. We can be sure that Christ, our perfect High Priest, will continue to work with us to bless all we undertake together as pastor and people in His church. For my part, I will seek to be faithful to my calling as a servant of Christ. I will try, with the help of God, to be what all God's people should be—imitators of Christ. I will strive to teach, preach, encourage, admonish, help and support, pray and care for you in such a way that you will see Christ at work in both me and the church. I know I have often failed, and I ask you to forgive me. I also pray that you will remember that Christ has not called pastors to work alone, but with God's people. So I ask you to pray for us, to forgive us when we need it, to work with us, and help us to minister to you and to our community. And we will see God do great things among us here at Foothills. Amen.