

## Hebrews 10:19-25

### “Let’s Come to Worship”

As we have journeyed through the Letter to the Hebrews together this summer, we have established certain truths that “The Preacher” who wrote it wanted Christians to know. Primarily that Jesus is now our High Priest, giving us personal access directly to God through him. One way to talk about this in theological terms is to say that Jesus’ atonement brought humanity into communion with God and with each other. We also know that because of this atonement, we have access to the Holy Place where we can experience God fully and personally.

Honestly, I have found the letter to be somewhat redundant. And my thoughts were validated when Tom Wright’s commentary says that all of Hebrews up to this point has brought us to the main idea of the letter. I guess the unknown author does not take the direct route that I do and get straight to the point – it has taken him ten chapters! Wright says that this passage basically asks the question, “If all that you have revealed up to now is true, so what?” or to say it another way, “What do we do with all that you have said?”

The answer is found in verse 22. “So let us therefore come to worship, with a true heart, in complete assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” This means that when we take into account all that The Preacher has shared with the readers of the letter to encourage them in their weariness, he says that the most important thing is to worship God. And to do it in very specific ways!

Now, I have to believe that the Holy Spirit is really at work in giving us this passage on this particular week. In truth, I have skipped a couple of passages that had originally been laid out for this series, but these verses actually line up perfectly with our “power launchers” from

Vacation Bible School this week. I say that the Holy Spirit is at work because, everyone knows that the Presbyterian way is to preach with 3 points and a poem. However, THIS passage has FOUR points and we had four power launchers. Can anyone help me share them with the whole congregation? GO BEYOND WITH FAITH . . . WITH BOLDNESS . . . WITH THANKFULNESS . . . GO BEYOND WITH HOPE. So let's launch into this Scripture together and see where it takes us!

The preacher tells us that there are four conditions that should exist in our hearts now that we have received all of his assurance. First, we come to worship knowing that we are baptized and forgiven. I saw a cartoon this week that caught my attention because our three-year old grandson has ALWAYS been fascinated with cell phones. This one showed a little baby holding a cell phone and saying into it, "Today at church, a man in a black dress tried to drown me and I KID YOU NOT, my parents and grandparents just stood there taking pictures."

But in truth, baptism is more than just a symbolic act or a photo opp. It is a covenant in which we or our parents recognize that we are part of a family of believers and have been given a new heart. Baptism is a reminder that God provides a deeper, inner cleansing for his children through the blood of His Son. This enables us to worship not with half-hearted commitment or with hearts that are heavy laden or diseased with envy, bitterness or grief but with hearts that are touched with forgiveness and cured by the grace of God.

Billy Graham once said, "Sin is the great clogger and the blood of Christ is the great cleanser." Coming to worship as those who are baptized and forgiven allows us to enter God's presence with hearts full of faith. In fact, we can have the same kind of faith that we learned about from Daniel this week.

Daniel's faith gave him the courage to pray ONLY to his God, even though he had been threatened with death if he defied the king. Yet, God rescued him and, in doing so, gave others faith as well. So, we can "Go beyond with faith" as we worship. Can everyone join me in this power launcher? GO BEYOND WITH FAITH

The Preacher in Hebrews also reminds us that when we worship, we worship as a community. We know this because he begins, "therefore, brothers and sisters". This is a reminder that we belong, not only to Jesus Christ but to each other. We are not strangers but have been welcomed into the inner sanctum of God when Jesus became the high priest and paved the way for us to speak directly to God. And in worship, we do it together as a family.

This week I visited one of our church members who is in the hospital. She is also unable to come to church regularly and so each week, she receives a bulletin and a copy of the sermon. She and her husband told me how much this means to them and I had to confess that it was Debby Keaton's idea. Our secretary is also a pastor's wife and began this process when she came to work with us.

The couple told me that, reading the announcements, seeing the liturgy and then reading the sermon made them feel like they were still part of the church! This was a wonderful comment on the body of Christ, reminding me how important it is to share worship, joys, burdens and plans with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And of course, we have combined strength and convictions when we know that people of like minds and hearts stand with us. This allows us to "Go beyond with Boldness".

An example of strength in numbers that allows us to be bold is the story of 12-year-old Domenic DiOrio, whose father once told him, "With one thin dime, you can't do much damage. But if you stack up 1,000 dimes, you can smash windows. Change can start with one thin dime."

Remembering what his father said as they drove past a homeless man one night gave Domenic the idea to start a charity called Dom's dimes.

The young man has collected 15,000 dimes so far for his charity to benefit the homeless in his town. Domenic has also received other denominations of currency, as well as personal care items, to give to the homeless. His heart and efforts have indeed encouraged a whole community to work together to aid the homeless. Change that started in the heart of one boy was indeed contagious!

This is the same kind of courage that Esther and Mordecai had when they joined together and made a plan to save their people, the Jews, from a decree of death. And this is what can happen when we come to worship as a community, knowing that we are not expected to do everything ourselves but with others whose hearts have been cleansed by God. Can Nazareth be bold as we worship? Let's GO BEYOND WITH BOLDNESS!

Next "The Preacher" tells us that when we come to worship, we come with hearts that praise God for deeds of compassion and mercy. God has shown us compassion and mercy from the first day of creation by giving us the gift of our world and our lives. But more specifically God has shown us how to **BE** compassionate and merciful in the life, teachings and ministry of Jesus.

When we come to worship, we come not just to pray and sing and listen to the preacher, but to have our hearts stirred to action. When we hear the word proclaimed and share the sacraments together, it is a reminder of the grace that we are called to share when we leave this place. It is a call to have our hearts fed so that we can feed others.

Knowing that God called prophets who did NOT want the jobs that they were given reminds us to be sacrificial with the lives that God has gifted to us. Hearing stories of Jesus

reaching out to women and touching lepers and including the children in his kingdom reminds us to be inclusive in all our work and worship and play. Reading about the faith of Peter and Mary Magdalene and Paul reminds us that God will give us the strength to accomplish unimaginable tasks when we believe more in God's love than we do in our own weaknesses.

And this allows us to be thankful for all that God has given us and done for us. Just like the ONE leper that took the time to come back and thank Jesus for his healing that we learned about Tuesday night. God wants us to recognize where our blessings come from and bring that gratitude with us when we worship. Are WE a church of gratitude? The let us remember the deed of compassion and mercy from our Heavenly Father and GO BEYOND WITH THANKFULNESS!

Finally, in this passage we learn that when we come to worship, we do so as those who can hope and hold on to the promises of God. This means that we must hold on to things even when we cannot see them. I am reading a wonderful book by Barbara Brown Taylor called Holy Envy. In it, she examines the world's other great religions in an effort to find out what element of each of these different faiths might be missing from Christianity. In the chapter on Judaism, I got a clearer picture of why the Jews, by and large, rejected Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

First Century Jews knew their Scripture much better than we will ever know ours. They KNEW what the promised Messiah was supposed to do and be. According to the Isaiah, he was supposed to be born of a virgin and his name would be Emmanuel. He also predicted that he would suffer and be despised. Micah said that he would be born in Bethlehem. And Zechariah said he would ride into Jerusalem, victorious on the back of a donkey and yet be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver. Many other Old Testament predictions concerning the life of Jesus came true.

But there were other prophecies that did not. Amos said when the Messiah came that justice would roll down like waters. Daniel said he would reign on an everlasting throne. And Micah said that when the Messiah came the whole world would come to Jerusalem to worship. These things did NOT come true or came true in a way that the Jews were unable to SEE at the time. So, they did not believe.

When we go beyond with hope, we have to accept that some promises have not been fulfilled yet. But because so many promises from God HAVE come true, we are called to be hopeful that ALL of God's plans will come to fruition in God's perfect timing.

This is especially hard to believe when we are suffering. When my father-in-law died this week, I tried to comfort my sister-in-law by reminding her that her parents, who loved each other SO much and have been separated by death for 18 years are now together again. But Jennifer cannot SEE them together in Heaven and so that promise may be hard to hold on to.

Faith calls us to cling to the belief that hope is not just a doctrine. Instead it is a living hope that is based on the resurrection of Christ. Hope means believing in resurrection even when we cannot see it because there is so much evidence that Jesus conquered death. Hope means being able to sing, even in the face of sickness and death and destruction and suffering, "Hear my cry, hear my call, hold me fast let I fall. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home."

Our last story in Bible School taught us that some of Jesus' followers were so hopeless after his death that they could NOT believe he had been resurrected. Yet when the disciples walking on the road to Emmaus had their eyes opened by the power of God and realized that Jesus HAD conquered death, they had a new and living hope.

Can we at Nazareth believe even in things we cannot see? Then let us GO BEYOND WITH HOPE! However friends, as much as God would have us worship with faith, boldness, thankfulness and hope, it is still a decision that God leaves up to each of us here.

That is why this passage ends the way it does – to encourage us in our doubts and discouragement. That’s why we come to worship – to fuel our Power Launchers! Hear “The Preacher’s” words to us again. “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Let us not only GO BEYOND, but indeed to worship with faith, boldness, gratitude and hope as we wait for ALL of God’s promises to be revealed to us in God’s time. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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