



Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost

November 14, 2021

* *Please stand if you are able*

Prelude: Variations on "Foundation"

Joseph M. Martin

Gathering

WELCOME & LIGHTING THE CHRIST CANDLE

Acolyte: Jesus Christ is the light of the world. We light this candle as a sign that Christ has come and Christ will come again. As the light pushes back darkness let us walk with, learn from, and worship Jesus Christ.

* CALL TO WORSHIP

Reader: I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord. All the good things I have come from You."

All: I have placed the Lord always in front of me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.

Reader: And so, my heart is glad. My soul is full of joy. *Psalm 16:2, 8-9 (NLV)*

* **All Singing: 538 "Holy, Holy Holy! Lord God Almighty"**
Singing verses 1-3

* GOD'S GREETING

* GOD'S PEOPLE GREETING ONE ANOTHER

* **All Singing: "Worthy is your Name"**

You are my strength when I am weak, you are the treasure that I seek, You are my all in all. Seeking you as a precious jewel, Lord to give up I'd be a fool, You are my all in all.

Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name, Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name.

Taking my sin, my cross my shame, rising again I bless your name, You are my all in all. When I fall you down you pick me up, when I am dry you fill my cup, You are my all in all.

Children ages 2–7 may come forward for a brief word and blessing before they leave for “God Loves Me” and “Children in Worship.”

CHILDREN’S BLESSING

Children: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: And also, with you.

Reconciliation

Liturgist: Keep me safe, my God, for in you I take refuge.

All: I say to the Lord, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.”

Liturgist: Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places; surely, I have a delightful inheritance.

All: My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead.

Liturgist: You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. *Psalm 16 adapted*

Silent Confession and Reflection

Liturgist: We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

All: For when Christ had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.

Liturgist: For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. The Holy Spirit testifies about this saying:

All: This is the covenant I will make with them, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds. Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.

Liturgist: And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. *Hebrews 10:10-18 adapted*

Choir: “Arise, My Soul, Arise!” by Dale Wood

Arise, my soul, arise! Stretch forth to things eternal, and haste thee to the feet of thy Redeemer God. Though hidden from mortal eyes, He dwells in light supernal, yet worship Him in humbleness and own Him Lord. His banquet of love awaits thee above; behold the marriage feast of the Lamb has come! Rejoice my soul, rejoice, to heav’n lift up thy voice: Alleluia! List to the harps of heav’n the song victorious, the never-ending anthem sounding through the sky. To mortals is not given, to chant its strains all glorious; yet sing, my soul, the praise of him who reigns on high. Who bought with His blood the ransomed of God; to Him be everlasting pow’r and victory. And let the great Amen resound through heav’n again. Alleluia!

Liturgist: Hebrews 13:1-6

* **All Singing: 682 “Before the Throne of God”**

Proclamation

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**All: Prepare our hearts, O God, to hear your Word and obey your will.
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Scripture: Hebrews 10:19-25

Minister: The Word of the Lord.

All: Thanks be to God.

Sermon: Therefore, church...

* **All Singing: 257 “Blest Be the Tie that Binds”**
Singing verses 1-2, 5-6

Dedication

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Liturgist: With joy, let us now offer our gifts, in music, heart, and resource, as a sign of our deep devotion and covenant faithfulness.

OFFERING

1. General Fund
2. Denominational Ministry Shares

Choir: “Bought With A Price” by Natalie Sleeth

You were blessed by the Word, born of the Spirit, called by the Pow’r divine.
You were led by the light, washed with the water, marked by a sacred sign.
You are part of the chosen people, you are children of Abraham.
You were bought with a price, spared by a sorrow, saved by the blood of the Lamb!

So what then does God require of you? Nothing in truth you cannot do:
This, this alone your whole life thru, but to walk in the way of the Lord!

You were claimed by the cross, graced by a glory, loved by the Lord on high.
You were fed by the faith, filled from the fountain, destined to testify!
You are part of the chosen people, you are children of Abraham.
You were bought with a price, spared by a sorrow, saved by the blood of the Lamb!
Bought with the price of a sacrifice and saved by the blood of the Lamb!

Adapted from 1 Cor. 6:20 and Micah 6:8

* **All Singing: 538 “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty”**
Singing verse 4

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Sending

* BENEDICTION

* **All Singing: 943 “God Be with You Till We Meet Again”**
Singing verses 1, 3, and 4

Postlude: "O Lord, What a Mornin!"

Jack Butler

Worship Leaders

Organist / Pianist: Dora Diephouse
Flutist: Lynn Hollender
Vocalist: Betsy Maher
Choir Director: David Baar
Accompanist: Beverly Baar
Minister: Roger Nelson

Acolyte: Lydia Carlson
Liturgist: Becky Starkenburg
Readers: Youth Worship Class
Prayer: Youth Worship Class

Hymns are from *Lift Up Your Hearts* (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2013)
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Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
Title: Therefore, Church....
Date: 11.14.21
Roger Allen Nelson

There are all sorts of churches for all sorts of people. Whatever your taste, whatever your bend, whatever your theology, there's a church for you....

Whether high church evensong, rollicking tent revival, mega-church with smoke, lasers and a ministry for everybody, Bible chapel, Pentecostal healing service, traditional Lutheran liturgy, old school southern black gospel, emergent hipster deconstruction project, Orthodox smells and bells, Mennonite simplicity, neighborhood parish, new-age-liberal-love-fest, on-line e-worship, intimate house gathering, earnest new church plant, dying mainline congregation, etc, etc, etc...

Whatever your vibe there's probably a church for you.

Churches are extensions and expressions of cultures. There may be some theology involved but as we are cultural creatures our churches usually mirror our cultures. Each church is reflective of a culture – a way of speaking, gathering, thinking, making music, etc. Each church is reflective of the dynamics of ethnicity, income, education, value, and expectation. Yes, there may be a theological identity (probably rooted in a response to some other theology) but churches are little cultural microcosms.

And that's okay.

That's reality.

There are lots of different kinds of churches for lots of different kinds of people.

However! All of those expressions of church, with all of those differences, are essentially responses to the good news of Hebrews. To quote Hebrews,

We have a high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we might receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need... (For) Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

For 10 chapters the writer of Hebrews makes the case that Jesus is the final and forever priest who makes satisfaction for our sins. We are the recipients of a divine mercy. God can't ignore our sin and God can't stop loving us, therefore, in love, in self-giving-sacrifice, God in Christ satisfies the demands of his own economy. Thank be to God.

That essential truth is at the core of every expression of church. No matter the cultural clothing, the heartbeat of the Christian church is the saving mystery of God in Christ.

Jesus is our substitute.

The blood of Jesus pays our debt.

Therefore, church...

Therefore, church....

That's what the writer of Hebrews offers here. After 10 chapters about Jesus as the High Priest, there's a subtle shift and our attention turns to practical-pragmatic-human-implications.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...let us...

Out text this morning features a number of "let us" statements. A series of responses. "Therefore, let us...." Let's consider a couple of those responses and their implications....

Last Sunday night four couples and a few kids gathered at Hope to consider a reformed understanding of baptism. The spirit with good, the conversation lively, and the teacher wasn't prepared so he repeated himself a lot.

The four couples represented all sorts of church traditions: Catholic, Baptist, Pentecostal, non-denominational-community-churches, Reformed, etc. They were diverse in interests, education, orientation, culture, and faith experience. What they held in common was that in response to the High Priest they wanted to consider baptism as part of our life together.

For, no matter your culture, or the tradition that shaped you, we're called to a life together. We don't baptize alone. There may be personal experiences with God in Christ but that relationship is always lived in relationship to one another. It is always lived in community.

The writer of Hebrews uses plural pronouns throughout this section – this is addressed not to solitary individuals but to a people together.

Now. That may not seem like a big deal, but in a culture that lifts up the rights, freedoms, and comforts of individuals, there is something here that cuts against the grain. Doug Bratt puts it this way:

"worship is a chance to love the people we don't like." That struck me as a profound insight in a culture that seems increasingly riven by deep differences over theology, politics, and efforts to mitigate this pandemic. Social commentators have shown how little many North Americans interact with those with whom they disagree. Even some Christians find it increasingly difficult to like the people with whom they disagree. I'm concerned that solitary or family rather than corporate worship may only reinforce that dislike. It, after all, gives Christians even fewer opportunities to interact with fellow Christians whom we love but don't necessarily like.

Yikes! That's harsh. There are all sorts of reasons that people stay away from Sunday worship. Some stay away because they won't or can't wear a mask, some stay away because it doesn't feel safe, and I'm sure some stay away because it's easier or more comfortable....

But by design, life in response to God in Christ is always lived in relationship to one another. If you're staying away from Hope (for whatever reason) know that you're loved and missed and we're diminished without you.

I know I'm overemphasizing Sunday morning worship attendance. I know it's just one way that the church is the church. Liturgy, a particular musical sensibility, and admittedly odd preaching on Sundays at 10:00 is a cultural construction. And in no way is this meant to shame anyone. But it is to recognize that "drawing near to God" is a communal activity.

As Barbara Brown Taylor puts it:

In an age of information overload... the last thing any of us needs is more information about God. We need the practice of incarnation, by which God saves the lives of those whose intellectual assent has turned them dry as dust, who have run frighteningly low on the bread of life, who are dying to know more God in their bodies. Not more about God. More God.

Life in Christ is incarnate – it is lived out in the flesh with one another.

Second.

I was a child of Jim Fixx and the running renaissance of the late seventies, so I ran track in high school and college. A lot of track meets in Iowa were at night and I well remember the dark silence of the backstraight, the sound of my breath, the light touch of the cinder-track, the pounding of my heart, and the wind at my back. It was just me in the flow, flying....

And then, as fatigue overwhelmed, lactic acid built up, and I'd start to swerve and stagger, just as my heart was pleading for more oxygen than my lungs could deliver, just then I'd round the last corner into the bright lights of the finishing straight. I'd hear the roar of the crowd and the exhortation of teammates and coaches who were lining the track. I'd want to quit. I'd want to pull over to the side and puke. I'd want to give up and slow to a walk. But I was "spurred on" by the encouragement of the community.

The Apostle Paul likens faith to running a race and the writer of Hebrews encourages us to "run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus..." And yet,
the truth is we get tired,
the dark of the backstraight is really hard,
and sometimes we want to quit because it just doesn't seem worth it.
Read the latest scandals of celebrity pastors and you'll want to pull over to the side and puke.

But, our text reads,

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope... And let us consider how we might spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up...

You get the idea. According to our text we need one another for encouragement to keep running the race of a faith. We need to cheer on one another – whether down the backstretch or headed toward home. We need one another that we might pursue love and good deeds. We need one

another that we might be more loving and more invested in the good – the good of others, the good of creation, the good of the church, the good of the weak, the poor, the marginalized.

Part of church is encouraging and spurring one another forward.

Finally.

There's lots of scholarly speculation about why some in the New Testament church stopped meeting together. There's no historical record of a pandemic, but boredom or persecution or anxiety broke the habit of gathering. There's only the line,

Let us.... not give (ing) up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encourage (ing) one another....

The Barna Group reports that in-person church attendance is down roughly 30% to 50% since before the pandemic. And it would be easy to plead and posture and pontificate about that, but listen to Tom Long, written decades ago,

The disincentives to corporate worship are many. It seems somehow purer to worship God all alone on a deserted beach or in the still beauty of the night under a canopy of stars rather than in the ragtag assembly that shows up for church. Also, we just get tired, tired in worship and tired of worship. It is not only that the sermon may ramble on or that the pace of the service can lag: the weariness of worship is a deeper fatigue, a jaded sense that nothing of real significance happens here.

Ouch. I get that. There's a cultural currency that works and that's wearying. But! No matter the church culture, underneath it all there is still the mystery of God Christ making a way for us into the Most Holy Place. In Christ we are still brought behind the curtain where we are assured that we are forgiven and free.

And, the church, no matter the cultural context, will survive, even this, because the Spirit will keep blowing us toward the mystery of God in Christ. And, the good news of Christ as our High Priest will always lead people to meet together. We will keep coming together to hold onto faith and hold onto one another. We will keep coming together to cheer on another and spur each other toward good works.

No matter how weary, no matter how jaded, no matter how deep our fatigue, the real significance is the mystery of God in Christ.

Might even make you want to go to church....

Amen.