

## **A Community of Love**

November 18, 2018

### Hebrews 10: 11-25

*<sup>11</sup> Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. <sup>15</sup> The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First, he says: <sup>16</sup> "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." <sup>17</sup> Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more." <sup>18</sup> And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*



Let us pray...

Today's passage begins with a reminder to us all. Jesus begins by reflecting on the important role that the temple priests played in the life and faith of the people of Israel. The priests would perform many duties in the temple, but today's passage focuses in on the sacrifices they would offer on behalf of the people. In this role, they would perform their duties over and over and over. Many, many sacrifices occurred every day in the temple. The most common sacrifice was the animal sacrifice. The animal would first be killed by slitting the throat. The blood would be collected to be sprinkled on the altar. The blood represented life and to place the animal's blood on the altar preserved and enhanced human life. Depending on the type of sacrifice being offered, a portion or all of the offering would then be burnt on the altar. Seven chapters in the book of Leviticus detail the sacrifices and give the instructions for how to perform each type of sacrifice. Today I will offer the reader's digest version.



Most sacrifices were individual offerings but each day there were also communal sacrifices. In either case, the sacrifice always involved transformation. In ancient Israel the most common way to transform something was to destroy it. The preferred method of destruction would have been burning. This process removes the animal or the oil or the grain from the ordinary realm and transfers it to the transcendent one. Once there, God would receive the smoke or the "pleasing odor" and, in so doing, would enjoy a fellowship meal with His children. In the offering of the sacrifice, the priest played the key role. The priest was required to bring about the transfer and transformation of the offering. The priest was not only the expert in the proper procedures but, perhaps more importantly, also bore the risk of moving into God's presence.

There were five types of offerings in ancient Israel. The most common were the sin, guilt, and purification offerings. These offerings were to make atonement for wrong-doing or sin in one's life. In the case of sin and purification offerings, the object sacrificed depended on the identity and status of the person required to make the offering. A priest, for example, had to bring a bull. Ordinary folk brought a female goat or sheep. An offering of grain was acceptable from the very poor. With these offerings, the innards or a handful of grain was burnt on the altar. Since these offerings were meant to repair the relationship of the giver with God, the remainder of the animal or grain then went to the priest.

There were also grain offerings and well-being or fellowship offerings. These offerings were "thank offerings" to God and were a celebration of the harvest or of other blessings in one's life. They were a way to say 'thank you' to God. With a grain offering, a handful of the grain would be mixed with oil and would be burnt on the altar, with the rest going to the priests. With the well-being or fellowship offering, a portion would be burnt, and the rest would be split between the priest and the person making the offering.

The last type of sacrifice was the burnt offering. This would involve a bull, goat, sheep, dove, or pigeon – again depending upon the person's status – and the whole animal would be offered on the altar. This was the most extravagant sacrifice as the entire animal was given to God. This type of offering would best parallel the offering that Jesus made on the cross for our sins. Jesus gave all of Himself on our behalf as a means to repair our relationship with God.

In our passage today, Jesus is reflecting on this very important role that the temple priests played day after day after day. To be in right standing with God was extremely important for observant Jews, so sacrifices were an integral part of their faith. In the first verse, verse 11, Jesus points out the flaw with this system, noting that these temple sacrifices *"never take away sins"*. The sin remains. Atonement has been paid, but the sin and guilt and shame remain.

In verses 12 through 19, Jesus explains how the sacrifice that He made on the cross is radically different. On the cross, Jesus *"offered for all time one sacrifice for sins"*. On the cross, Jesus was the final sacrifice, once and for all time defeating the power of sin and death. In doing so, *"by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy"*.



Through Jesus' work on the cross, we are made new again over and over - each time we repent and seek forgiveness. Eventually, we will be made perfect forever, one day entering our eternal rest. The new covenant that was forged on the cross brings a new heart into all who call on Jesus as Lord and Savior. Quoting from Jeremiah, when the Holy Spirit brought this prophetic word, God said, *"I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds"*. The new covenant is built upon God's sovereign grace. Under the old covenant, God remembered their sins, even though He did not immediately pour out His wrath. With the new covenant, Jesus' blood blots out our sins, prompting God to say, *"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more"*. Because our sins are no more, sacrifice is no longer necessary. This is why we have a table for the Lord's Supper instead of an altar for sacrifices. At the table we remember the body and blood that was broken and poured out to establish this new covenant.

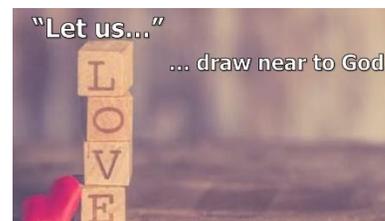


Verse 19 begins with the word “therefore”. This marks a transition point in our text for today. Because of the sacrifice that Christ made on our behalf, therefore we can enter into the holy place, into that place where we are in community with God. Remember, in the Jewish mind, only the priest could enter the most holy place inside the temple. And this was only once a year and under strict supervision. To enter this most holy space without permission or to err once inside brought death. But now, with this *“new and living way”* opened by the blood of Christ, as Christians we can enter God’s holy presence with assurance and confidence. The door to God’s presence had been flung wide open. In His perfect and sinless blood, we are able to be washed clean. Through His grace, our sins are no more - we can boldly enter God’s presence. Christ’s blood also unites us. He died once for all – for you and for me and for you and for you and for you. Because Christ died once for all, offering us this wonderful gift of love, we are bound together as the community of love.

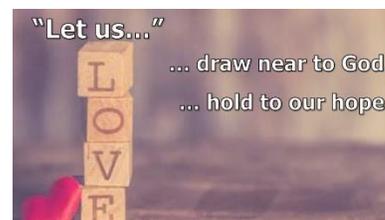


It is with this reality that Jesus transitions to the four *“Let us...”* statements that we find in verses 22 through 25. Because we are made right with God, because our sins are washed away, because we can enter boldly into God’s presence, let us too do these four things. When we recognize the generous grace that God gives us, then we can be truly thankful for the many things that we have in life – things that we cannot earn and things that we do not deserve. It is through Christ’s single offering that we are perfected in love. Through this generous gift of love, we find the motivation to give generously to God out of a sense of irrepressible gratitude.

The first "let us" statement is, *"let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings"*. Let us draw near to God. We can stand before God certain that our sins are forgiven by virtue of our faith in Jesus. Jesus' blood cleanses us from our sins and perfects our hearts. It is from this state of perfection that we are made new again each time we repent and choose to walk faithfully with Christ. We are saved based not because of our efforts or through our work, but by faith in Christ alone. Our confidence comes in the object of our faith, Jesus Christ. Once we call on Jesus' name and profess faith in Him, we are saved. We are saved, not just in a temporary way, but forever. Once we profess faith in Jesus, our status is saved. We may stumble at times, falling to our sin, but our status remains saved.



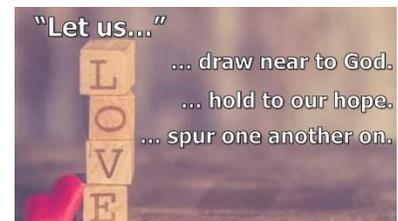
The second "let us" statement is, *"let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful"*. We hold onto our hope that we find in Christ. We profess that Jesus is Lord and that Jesus saves sinners. In this profession we place our hope. We hold this hope unswervingly not by our own tenacity or by our own ability, but by God's faithfulness to us.



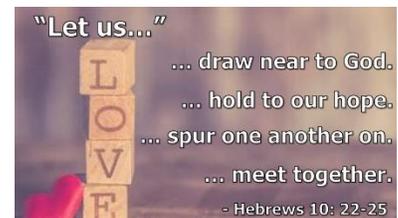
God holds His side of the covenant no matter what we do or do not do. God loves us. God is faithful. Period. It is God's power that helps us cling to the hope we profess. These first two statements are largely personal. We alone know the true nature of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Do we have a sincere heart? Do we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior? Is Jesus our hope? We alone know the condition of our hearts and where our relationship with Jesus Christ

really is. Yet we also know that we do these things best when we do them within community.

In verse 24, the statements move towards the general community of love and how we interact with one another. The third "let us" statement is, *"let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds"*. As a community of faith, we come to learn that we cannot have confidence and full assurance of faith apart from the church, apart from each other. Hence, let us spur one another on. We cannot endure on our own. We each need the community of faith for encouragement. We bring out the best in one another. As a body that believes that we are to be Christ's hands and feet in the world, we must take an active role in stirring one another up to love and good works. As the body of Christ, we are to hold one another accountable. We are to see gifts in each other and we are to encourage the use of those gifts. We are to help one another grow in maturity in our faith. All of this can happen only within the context of Christian community.



And, lastly, the fourth "let us" statement asks us to continue to meet together, encouraging one another on our journeys of faith. The writer of Hebrews warns those who have given up meeting together. When we neglect meeting together we cut ourselves off from the very means by which Christ feeds, assures, and protects His people. Isolation can breed selfishness and pride. There is power in showing up. It is here that we are fed, challenged, and find encouragement to



love others and to offer works of love to those in need. When we join together, working toward a common goal or purpose, then we are most effective.

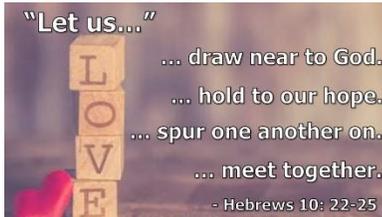
When we meet together we can also encourage one another. This thing – faith – it can be hard. There will be times when we are down, when we feel as if life is getting the best of us. There will be times when loss or suffering or trial come our way. There will be times when we feel all alone. And there will be times when we even feel as if God were not there. Into all of these tough situations, when we are living in Christian community we can share comfort and hope and assurance and peace. Our presence is often one of the most sacred gifts that we can offer one another.

Each of these statements remind us that God created us to live in community. As the community of faith, we are called to love God and to love each other, above all else, and to be a community of love. As the community of love, we know that we are called to care for one another. We do so by offering God, our church, and each other gifts of love. We give of our time, our talents, our resources, our money not out of a sense of duty or obligation, but from a place of love and of gratitude. The gift of salvation through Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of sins are just two of the many ways that God has personally blessed each of us.



This week we will all gather with family and friends for Thanksgiving. We will rejoice in the ways that God has blessed us and our family and friends, and we will give thanks. It is a good week to also rejoice in the blessings that God has

brought upon our church and to celebrate the ways in which our church has been a blessing to us and to our community. As we each take time to consider how we are a part of the community of love that is Winner United Methodist Church, I invite you to begin to consider what God is calling you give in order to



support the life and work of the church. This week, as we consider what God is calling us to do for one another, for our church, and for our community, let us each draw near to God, hold to our hope, spur one

another on, and meet together as the community of love. May it be so for us all. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) In what ways has your understanding of “God’s generous grace” grown as you have matured in your faith?
- 2) How and where is God calling you to give to your church? Pray for guidance and direction as draw nearer to December 2<sup>nd</sup>!
- 3) Who do you know this day that needs to know God’s peace or comfort or love or presence? How can you serve them by being what they need?