

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 10, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 4, 287:4, 296, 321, 334.

Lessons: Psalm 119:1-16, Hebrews 4:14-5:10, Matthew 11:28-30.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 10:19-25.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In 2023 we are bombarded with so much information and opportunities that it is very easy to ignore some critical, life-saving information and opportunities.

The most critical, life-saving information we can find is in the Word of God, the Bible.

Satan, the devil, is doing his best to take the Word of God away from us. In recent years there were times when our normal worship opportunities were diminished.

Yet we do have opportunities every week to get together with fellow confessors of Jesus Christ, with those who believe, teach and confess as we do.

Our text today includes

AN ENCOURAGEMENT NOT TO GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER!

- 1. Why do we meet together?**
- 2. Satan has placed stumbling blocks and temptations into our lives,**
- 3. But God reminds us of the benefits of getting together with and worshipping with fellow Christians.**

The letter to the Hebrew Christians points plainly to Jesus Christ, who as our great high priest sacrificed himself so that all who believe in him as Savior can enter into heaven.

These verses in chapter 10 are a conclusion, which points out that we have confidence to approach God because of what Jesus did and we see a most sincere invitation, encouragement, and admonition to draw near to God, to encourage one another, and to gather together to worship our God.

Make no mistake that the devil wants nothing more than to take the Word of God away from us and to destroy our faith in Jesus Christ. Despite the difficulties which we face every day, we realize that as the day of God's judgment grows closer, times will get more difficult and we pray daily 'come quickly, Lord Jesus!' But while we are still on earth, we have the assurance and comfort and confidence to approach God through Jesus Christ.

So why do we meet together? We come to be reminded of the forgiveness of sins. We are assured that our perfect high priest has made perfect sacrifice for our sins

Believers can draw near God's presence in heaven openly and boldly. Under the old covenant sinners dared not draw near the symbol of God's presence in the Most Holy Place in the Tabernacle. Only the high priest could do that and then only once a year and with fear and trembling. The Word of God reminds us that we can come anytime to our Father in heaven, "*by the blood of Jesus*". There is no other way. His blood in payment for our sins has opened the path to heaven where no tollbooth need ever be built.

Jesus Christ has given the ultimate sacrifice so that you can have eternal life. Remember that you are a heartbeat away from entering the most holy place in heaven. Do you really want to give it up?

We share in the forgiveness of sins announced to us. We have the assurance to approach the Supreme God knowing that his only-begotten Son paid the penalty for all our sins. Here we read again about the reason that we – and all who believe in Jesus Christ as the one who rescued them from their sins – have for gathering together. This chapter of the Bible reminds us again that Jesus Christ is the great high priest who made the ultimate sacrifice to

ransom mankind from sin and the power of the devil. The Old Testament priests of God's chosen people made sacrifices to God. Such sacrifices included killing animals – bulls, lambs, goats, doves – in thankful dedication to the true God. Such sacrifices were pointing toward the great sacrifice the Son of God would make to redeem mankind. Jesus gave his body, his life to open the way to God for us.

We see Jesus opening the way through the curtain in the tabernacle and later the temple which separated the Most Holy Place from the outer room of the temple. In the Old Testament only the high priest was permitted to enter this place, and that only once a year. But now we – every believer – has confidence to enter that place because of the blood of Jesus. As the great high priest as well as the king, he is the ruler of our little flock. Jesus Christ is the reason ***“we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.”***

Yet, as you heard last Sunday, even though we are a little flock, we do have opportunities every week to get together with fellow confessors of Jesus Christ, with people who believe the same things we do. And especially in the Lord's Supper, as we together receive the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine, we show our complete unity.

In your lifetime you have heard and experienced many reminders about the importance of gathering around the Word of God and gladly hearing and learning it. You have learned Luther's explanation of the Third Commandment which commands us that ***“We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and his Word but regard it as holy, (that is, hold it sacred) and gladly hear and learn it.”*** At your confirmation you promised ***“with the help of God” “to continue firm and strong in the confession of this church, and suffer everything, even death, rather than fall away from it”***. You promised ***“By the grace of God” “faithfully to live all your life according to the rule of the divine Word of God, ... to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, and to live in such a way as to honor the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death”***.

Today you hear again the invitation to ***“draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”*** Our hearts have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus to cleanse our guilty consciences and comfort us with the forgiveness of sins. We have been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

And our text goes on: ***“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”***

Early Christians enjoyed a fellowship which drew them together for worship and preparation for the coming of the day of the Lord – judgment day. We read about them on Pentecost: ***They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*** (Acts 2:42 NIV) ***“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*** (Acts 2:46-47 NIV)

The author of Hebrews emphasizes that this practice of assembling together ought to increase as the community of believers sees the day of Christ approaching.

Every disciple, every believer has access to God and is encouraged to persevere because of the sure hope of God's faithfulness. Each disciple is encouraged to minister to others, to serve others, by encouraging them in a life of love expressed in good deeds. Every disciple has a priestly responsibility in relation to others.

In the words of our text we also see the importance of worship. The Bible admonishes us to approach God in confident worship. ***“Let us draw near to God and Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.”*** Worship always involves individuals and God. It is not the experience of a spectator. Worship means personal involvement. We do not watch worship; we worship. No greater privilege exists today!

Christ brings us together as a family. Isolation and individualism are opposed to what Christ wants us to do. We speak often of the Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints. But we know that that invisible congregation of believers finds its visible expression in Christian worship with those who believe, teach, and confess the same. Christians seek ways to encourage one another to express love through good deeds. Worship together is one way we gain strength and motivation from other disciples.

Believers are to consider how they can be of service to each other, especially stirring up each other to more vigorous and abundant fruits of faith. We have opportunities to assemble together for worship, for singing God's praises, by praying to him – all of the things listed in the second commandment as ways to properly use God's name: calling upon God's name in every trouble, praying to him, praising him, and giving thanks to him for everything.

No Christian lives on an island or for himself alone. With his attitudes and actions he has an effect on others. ***“Let us consider how we might spur one another on,”*** As members of one body in Christ we need to spur each other on ***“toward love and good deeds.”***

How to spur each other on in love and good deeds is stated first negatively, then positively. ***“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing”*** is the negative side. Believers need to gather together to be strengthened and to give strength. Believers go to the gatherings for worship and fellowship not just for themselves, but to give to others. Let the subtle error that believers don’t need the church, that they can sit alone at home on Sunday mornings be laid to rest by that strong urging. Like blades of grass growing together or charcoal briquettes glowing together, we need each other.

The positive side is ***“Let us encourage one another.”*** To encourage does not mean to lecture or criticize. Standing alongside and helping each other where needed is far better than giving up meeting with each other. Giving and receiving strength when tempted, urging and being urged when wavering, comforting and being comforted when sorrowing are pluses to be found in gathering around the Word. If the Hebrew Christians needed such urging all the more as they saw the Last Day coming, what about us some 2000 years closer to that Day? ***“Consider how to spur one another on,”*** the author writes for our benefit, too.

Isn’t there a tremendous danger that we will despise preaching and God’s Words? Of course there is. The commandments show God’s Law. They show our disobedience, our stubbornness, our sinfulness. They show us that we have not obeyed God’s law, not any of the commandments.

Jesus was talking to all men, and that includes us, with our sinful hearts included, when he said: ***“He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.”*** (Luke 10:16 NIV)

We must always be reminded of the importance of publicly gathering with our fellow Christians by these words ***“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”***

To the Jews who rejected him and did not believe in him, Jesus said: ***“He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”*** (John 8:47 NIV)

The Last Day, Judgment Day, is spoken of as the “day of the Lord” or simply ***“the Day.”*** Its certain approach is an encouragement to faithful assembling of believers. The coming Day of Judgment is cause for continued personal faithfulness as well as encouraging others to be faithful.

Remember our motivation. What is the motivation for joining in worship with fellow Christians? That is summarized in the sacrifice Jesus made for your sins, for my sins, for the sins of all men. Jesus, our great high priest, has opened heaven for us! God loved you that much. Believe it so that you may receive the advantage of that sacrifice!

Jesus Christ made the right sacrifice to bring us back to life. ***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.”*** (Ephesians 2:4-5 NIV)

He’s brought us back from the death of sin, the prisonership of Satan. He has set us free. Jesus gave up his life so that we might live. That’s our gift by believing it. God’s love for us in Jesus Christ is the motivation. Jesus Christ and what he has done for us is the motivation. He’s given us a reason to live. He’s given us a sure hope of eternal life.

Because Jesus, our great high priest has opened heaven for us, ***“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*** Amen.