

## **Sermon Text for Sunday, November 18, 2018 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

Scripture – Hebrews 10:19-39

### **Let's Get Ready to Worship!**

Thanksgiving is a time for family – a time when we gather at the family table and give thanks for our abundance. At the Lord's Table we also gather to give thanks. Thanksgiving is also the beginning of a season of giving. Giving gifts; giving back; giving of ourselves. We go to church – sometimes – and we gather as a community to give thanks in a church where we worship God. So how do we prepare ourselves to do that. What makes worship in this church so special that we want to come back every week?

This scripture is about preparing to worship. Preparing to enter the most Holy Place – this sanctuary – on a Sunday morning. Preparing to worship a King.

Let's explore what this scripture says about worshipping a King. In previous readings from Hebrews, we learned that Jesus is our great High Priest, interceding on our behalf in God's Holy sanctuary. In fact, his sacrifice makes it possible for us to approach the throne. The writer of Hebrews is our preacher today, helping us to Get Ready to Worship!

In verse 20 we are told about the new and living way that [Jesus] opened for us through the curtain – a new way we can approach the throne – through the tearing of the curtain / his flesh at the crucifixion. That is how we can approach with confidence. That curtain was a separation of the people from God, at the crucifixion that curtain was torn so that we can now, through Christ Jesus, approach the throne.

We also are able to approach with confidence because we do not enter the Holy Sanctuary alone. In this scripture the preacher addresses us as brothers, or friends, or brothers and sisters. The point is that we are not alone when we worship – something wonderful and mysterious happens in this holy sanctuary when we worship. It happens when we gather to worship, we create a sacred space where we sit in the presence of God. It doesn't matter if we are 30 or 130, we join with a heavenly host to worship and praise the God Almighty. We enter that place with confidence because we are children of God, not strangers or outcasts but part of the family of God. Seated at the family table for a heavenly banquet prepared from the finest foods.

We worship with confidence because we worship with all baptized believers, washed with pure water having confessed that Jesus Christ is Lord. We now have the confidence of faith as the preacher tells us in verse 22. We come to worship assured of God's acceptance, where our hearts heavy laden by the cares of life are lifted and burdens freed as we worship in the presence of the One who saves. Jesus is right here in our midst within this most holy sanctuary, this sacred place where we meet God.

We worship with confidence because we come holding on to God's promises, "for He who has promised is faithful" verse 23. When we worship in this sacred space, we come knowing God's promise of salvation is fulfilled, but we wait and hope for "the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." We worship in the already and the not yet. As we worship together we see the kingdom already here all the while knowing God's promises are not yet fully revealed. A few weeks ago we talked about the glorious banquet prepared for all people of all nations. That is our hope. God has promised that a time is coming when no mother will weep for her lost children, when all will have a place to live and

food to eat, when many will come from east and west, north and south, for a great homecoming at God's extravagant banquet table. There will be no more mass shooting, no more taxes or debt, no more little children hungry and families without homes. That is what we hope for, this homecoming is what we practice every Thanksgiving day at our feasts. So we hope, and we hold on to Jesus. But . . .

Hope cannot be passive.

When we come to worship, we come not to just pray and sing, we come revering God and praising him with deeds of compassion and mercy. True worship is more than just sitting in the pews and going through the motions on a Sunday morning. Notice verse 24, "let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." What does it mean to spur someone on – dictionary says it means to encourage someone to do something or to encourage them to try harder to achieve something. The NSRV bible states "let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." Provoke is a little more aggressive than spur. This suggests a more active participation in the mission and ministry of the church – provoking means pushing each other into deeds of love, compassion, and mercy. That is the work of the church, our purpose is to love and give of ourselves with deeds of compassion and mercy. Maybe that is the direction church discipline should be going, provoking one another into this work.

Now we get to verse 25 which states we should not neglect to meet together, "as some are in the habit of doing." WHY? Why do we fall into the habit of neglecting to worship together, corporate worship is important to our faith lives. Some say it is a more fulfilling spiritual experience to try to meet God through nature, walking in the woods, or in the silence of the night-time sky under a canopy of stars. But, the bible states in Matthew 18:20 "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." The reality is that in our corporate worship, in the fellowship of this sacred space, whether in a Cathedral or in the boardroom, whenever Christians cluster together to worship we walk through the doorway of an ordinary building, an earthly tent, and find ourselves in the company of heaven singing praises with the heavenly hosts. What could be more spiritually fulfilling than that?

We get tired of worship don't we? Tired of the uninspired off-key singing of the same old hymns in the same old liturgical setting. We become jaded and wonder if our lives are changed at all on a Sunday morning. Do we come to church for drama and excitement?

What the preacher here knows, and what we should realize is . . .

while others may be sitting in their easy chairs reading the latest best seller or on a beach somewhere soaking up the rays on a Sunday morning, the faithful in the sanctuary doing their best to belt out the hymns in their off-key voices have been gathered by a mystery beyond their own seeing and knowing into the great choir of the angels in festal garb and the saints singing ceaseless praises to God. What looks like leisure turns out to be exhausting and what appears to be the labor of prayer leads to a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace that lasts. That is what makes worship in this sacred space so special.

Now the preacher gives a warning, similar to warnings heard in the past. verse 26, if we deliberately keep on sinning, even after we know the truth, the only thing left for us is judgement. I don't think the preacher here is talking about the everyday sins of the flesh. The sins that Paul mentions in Romans when he laments of knowing the right thing to do but not being able to do it. We are all sinners, that is a fact we cannot deny or hide from. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But, we can rest

on the promise that God has rescued us from the death of sin. Even when we hear in these verses about the promise of judgement, we know that God's judgement is good. God is fair, God is just. We praise God because we know we have a merciful loving God who does not get mad at sinners but offers reconciliation. God's good judgement sets things right, repairs the broken creation.

Nevertheless, the warning stands for those who know full well the glory of God's grace and forgiveness yet choose instead death. Verse 29 implies, "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished, who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" Vengeance is mine says the Lord, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living Lord." God's punishment awaits those who deny Christ, God will punish the unrepentant do not doubt that. Just as assuredly as you and I sit here today, know that God WILL punish those who know the truth about salvation yet choose to turn away from God.

There's your hell-fire and brimstone – but let's not end there okay?

The preacher here turns to encouragement. Yes, there is judgement awaiting those who reject the truth, but remember the times when you stood in the face of persecution, V. 32. Remember back when you first received the light, the good news of Jesus Christ – the promises. Remember the joy you felt. Remember the compassion and the warmth of forgiveness. Reach back and recall how you persevered and remember the hope you had "because you knew that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting." What we have through Christ Jesus is better and more lasting than what the world offers. Hold on to those joys, when worship seems tiring and uninspired. Remember the promises that are not yet fulfilled. When the work of mission and ministry seems too hard, remember the joy of compassion and the knowledge that something greater is ours. Remember because, "in just a very little while, he who is coming will come." What we hope for is just out of our reach but within sight inside this sacred space when we are gathered in worship. We must hold on – persevere – encourage each other, spur each other on, provoke one another. We gain strength as we worship. "We are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved" v. 39.

We gather on Thanksgiving, and today as every Sunday, in this sacred space with a host of heavenly beings joining our voices in the chorus of saints ceaselessly praising the Holy of Holies, our Almighty God – the King of Kings. This is how we worship a King and praise a God who is faithfully keeping promises. When you enter this sanctuary, make your worship meaningful by recalling that Christ Jesus is here with us and we are in the company of the Holy of Holies – worshiping with the heavenly hosts in a most sacred space at the foot of the throne. Our worship transforms this space from an ordinary room to glimpses of the kingdom.