

Sermon Reading: Hebrews 10:22-25

Sermon Theme: It's Really that Simple

It's really that simple. We see many decide that it is not. They had their reasons. They felt they were good reasons; valid reasons too. If they hadn't, they wouldn't have left Jesus. So why do the Twelve decide to continue to stay in Jesus' presence? It's not because they are better people. It's not because of family and friends who might stick around. It's not because of popularity, convenience, or programs Jesus would offer in which they could be involved. Peter says, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life"** (John 6:68-69) It's really that simple. It still is. It's this promise that Jesus gives and you have that works in us to not only hear but desire to follow the encouragement from Hebrews 10:22-25:

"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. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ 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."

It's really simple. All the work is done for you. You simply show up and receive. God wants you near him. He wants to be with you. That's why he gave his one and only Son. That's why Jesus sheds his blood and dies. You have been washed clean to be with God! He's not a faraway God who holds you at arm's length too busy for you. He wants you to draw near so he brings you to him.

He wants you near because he knows what you need: real hope. This isn't just more wishful thinking like you hope that it might rain, or you hope your team wins, or you hope that you have a good night's sleep. The hope God gives is certain. He is faithful. He does not change. It's the hope that one day I will be out of this world of disappointment, frustration, and struggles and with the Lord forever. This hope is the guarantee that when I close my eyes for the last time here, I will open them to see my Savior waiting for me with open arms and the crown of victory to put on my head. It's the certain hope that my sins are forgiven today and they will not come back to haunt me when I stand in judgment before God's throne. Instead I will hear, "Well done good and faithful servant. Come and enjoy your Father's happiness." It's not because I hope I did enough; I never could and

neither could you. It's because of what Jesus did for me, sealed to me with his blood, and guaranteed for me with his rising from the dead. He did it for you too. It's the certain hope that until he calls me home, no matter what happens in my life, God is on my side and it will be okay because Jesus' perfect life and innocent death have fixed my relationship with God. I don't have to just wish really hard that it will work out; I know it will because God is faithful. He always keeps his promises. He does not lie.

God knows how too often I can struggle with all of this; I need almost a daily reminder! I'm sure you do too. So he doesn't leave me alone; he doesn't you either. He gives us each other to lovingly push towards love and good deeds. He gives us each other to help shoulder each other's burdens. He puts on your hands and speaks with your mouths to give the love that we so desperately need to keep our eyes on the prize of eternal life. It's really that simple.

We tend to overcomplicate things. So much tries to put itself in our way of drawing near to God. There's so much pulling at you and trying to keep from him when you are at home in prayer, your own devotional life, or from being here in God's house. What is it for you? The thing is, they only will if you let them. God already did all the work and brought you to him through faith he creates and gives. So much keeping you from God and his presence is you. It really is that simple.

We make this more difficult because we think we know how this all works. Nothing is for sure. Even our best plans need "what-ifs" and "if this happens" built into them because we just don't know. Past sins and current temptations may have you wondering if God really has forgiven me or will again. You hear the news and see what's happening in their lives—who is in control? You know what you believe and what God's Word teaches will offend. Many still feel the same as in Jesus' day: this is too hard of a teaching too accept. So you might yourself wavering and doubting. Instead of trust in the one who is faithful, we demand more proof, more numbers, and more facts. What he gives us feels too simple.

Then when it comes to considering each other and encouraging, we wonder, is that any of my business? We will hear: you don't need to go to church to be a Christian. If I don't feel like being there, I shouldn't go. We are quick to say, "I have no right to judge how they are living or what they decide to do!" You are right! But God's Word judges and it is our responsibility to lovingly encourage each other. We will talk about it. We will say someone should do something. But will we do what brothers and sisters in Christ are called to do?

Maybe it's because we have our own ideas of how God should be acting. It might simply be a priority problem and have forgotten that a priority problem is a sin against God's first commandment to fear, love, trust him above all things—especially yourself. It might be because our eyes are so focused on tomorrow, eternity seems so far away. It's really this simple: there will always be more things that will try and keep you from being in God's presence, being fed with his Word and Sacrament. There will always be more work to do, more things that call for your attention. There will always be something else. So who will you serve?

So why is it we want to listen and follow God's Word today and every day? Why should I draw near to God's presence? Why should I go to church?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially you confirmation students: the reason we want to do this is not because we are trying to keep God happy. He already is. It's not because we need to prove something to him. Jesus already did it all and gives it to you. We want to be here because this is where God promises to be. This is where God comes to you. Draw near to him with the full assurance that he wants you to be with him. Look again and see how baptism has saved with you with the washing of water and the word. You have a clean conscience before God. Sin's curse and stain have been washed from you with the blood of the Lamb and God welcomes you with open arms. Draw near to him as he comes to you. Go to him in prayer—he's ready to listen and eager to answer. Be near him in Word and Sacrament where he comes to you.

Hold firmly to the hope we confess. You hold the words of eternal life as your own through the faith that Jesus gives and the Holy Spirit works. So much that wants your attention and is keeping you busy will one day be gone. What you have in Jesus is forever. Because he lives, we know without a doubt that this is ours.

So let us consider one another that we might lovingly push each other along. It is your business to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ to be about God's business—to love as Jesus loved, to do the good work that he has set out for us to do. This isn't just for a certain few. This isn't just the job of the pastor or called workers. Get it out of your head that it isn't your place. We are a family in Christ. Christianity means being together. We go to church because that's what Christians do! And so we gather together and encourage each other to do so. And as families gather together do, we sit down for a meal at the Lord's Supper. Together we proclaim the Lord's Death until he returns and assure one another: I believe the same thing you do. Together we confess as we stand side-by-side: I'm a sinner

who needs forgiveness just like she does, just like he does and just like they do I believe I receive it here with Jesus' body and blood in the bread and wine. And as a family does, we pray together and for each other. We encourage and carry each other's burdens. Point each other's eyes on the prize of eternal life. Forgive one another and share Jesus' love and peace.

My dear confirmands, you've heard me tell you as my pastor growing-up told me: the single most important thing in your life is your relationship with Jesus. You will continue to face so many temptations to keep you from him. But God is faithful. He will never leave or forsake; he is with you always. He continues to call out, brings you near to Him in His Word always eager to welcome you in. Draw near to him. Hold firmly to the hope we confess. Encourage each other. Why? It's really this simple: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life. Amen.