

Let Us

Hebrews 10:19-25

Baxter T. Exum (#1697)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
July 16, 2023



It is good to be back in Madison this morning! We had a good trip to North Carolina, we got to be with my in-laws for a bit, and we also got to check in on two of our former members Donald and Lynn, and we actually got to worship with Donald at the church in Cary, North Carolina (where the Grodis were members for a while). We had a safe and encouraging trip, but it is good to be back home. If you are visiting with us today (either here in person or online), we are glad to have you with us, and we would invite you to fill out a visitor card (either online or by using a card from the pew in front of you). And if you have any questions or concerns about your time with us today, please feel free to pull me aside after worship today.

We are here this morning to preach the good news concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. As we've outlined on the wall up here (or on your screen at home) we obey the good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, at which point we are born into God's family and the Christian life begins. And we've had a number of examples this week, starting with an update from Igor Egirev, who lives in St. Petersburg, Russia. I know we've had several updates from Ukraine over the past year or so, but I don't remember any updates from Russia. Russia has fallen out of favor in most of the world today, but it's interesting that life goes on, and God continues doing some amazing things over there. As translated by Facebook, Igor says, "On the 4th of July our daughter Katya was born from above! Praise the Lord for His great love and mercy!" Katya, blessed with freedom from sin, on the 4th of July, no less, in Russia. So good to see it.

This next update comes to us from the church in Honolulu, Hawaii. We visited there while visiting family several years ago. Some of the greatest singing we've ever heard! But they posted a few days ago and they say, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice! Kate made the decision to be baptized into Christ this morning along with her stepmother, Nina. Nina does not know English very well. But Kate translated the Word for her, helping her to understand the importance of obeying the gospel of Christ. After they confessed the great confession, they were immersed for the forgiveness of their sins. Praise God!" Now, what is especially interesting to me is that Kate is a landlord and was invited to worship by two of her tenants, Craig and Robin, who are members of the church. Their landlord is now a Christian sister! So good to see this! And there are many more we could have shared this week, but we've shared this to try to illustrate what it means to obey the gospel. And if you have not yet obeyed the gospel yourself, we invite you to get in touch. Pull me aside

after worship today or reach out using the contact information on the website or on the bulletin, and we would love to study together.

This morning we return to our study of Hebrews! Over the past several months, we've learned that the book of Hebrews perhaps started as a sermon that was then written down, and it's addressed to some people who were starting to have a hard time listening to Jesus. So, the author (or speaker) warns about the danger of turning back: Pay attention to what you have heard, because Jesus is better. And this is the theme of the book of Hebrews. Up to this point, we've looked at Jesus as being a better messenger, better than the angels, better than Moses, he is the mediator of a better covenant, a better high priest serving in a better sanctuary, and he is certainly a better sacrifice. We now come to a huge **"therefore."** The message takes a turn toward the practical, and from here on in the book of Hebrews, we apply what we've learned up to this point. This is what it means for us. The author doesn't just want us stockpiling facts in some kind of Bible trivia database, but he wants us to do something.

Today's passage is Hebrews 10:19-25, and it's a passage we actually studied in our Sunday morning adult class back in October. Back then, I told you we were headed for a study of Hebrews in our worship assemblies, and here we are, back to Hebrews 10! And in this passage, the author reminds us of what we have (basically summarizing the whole book up to this point), and then he comes in with three commands in the form of three **"let us"** statements (and that explains the lettuce on the wall up here)! Romaine isn't my favorite, but it fit on the slide, so here we are! But let's start by looking at the text itself. This is Hebrews 10:19-25,

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

As we look at this passage, I want us to start with the first three verses, where the author reminds us of what we have. And this will be the basis for what comes next. We basically have some introductory material in verses 19-21. So, let's notice that we start with a **"therefore,"** and a **"since,"** and a **"since."** As we sometimes say, when we come to a **"therefore"** in the text, we need to ask ourselves what it's there for. And the **"therefore"** is there for a reason! He's about to give a series of commands, based on everything he's said up to this point. So, he starts with a summary:

And in this summary, the first gift we've been given under this new covenant, under this new and living way, is that we have **"confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus."** As we've noted several times over the past few months, Jesus blazed a trail for us. By offering himself on the cross for us, he opened the door for us, through the veil, right into the presence of God. And that's the first **"since."** We have **"confidence"** to enter the holy place. And this would have been unheard of among the Jewish people. That kind of access to God was limited to the high priest, once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and only after a blood sacrifice, and even then, the priest was almost certainly terrified. Under the new and living way, though, we have confidence to enter that holy place, thanks to Jesus.

The second *“since,”* the second gift we’ve been given, is that we’ve been given Jesus as a great priest over the house of God. And as we’ve noted over and over again in this series of lessons, a priest is a go-between, representing the people before God. As our priest, Jesus is perfect, but since he’s lived in the flesh, he also understands what we’re going through. This is the second *“since.”* We have confidence to enter God’s presence, and we have Jesus as our high priest. And I just love that he doesn’t say that we *“need”* to have confidence, he’s not saying that we *“need”* to rely on Jesus as our high priest in this passage, but he’s saying: This is the way it is, and since these things are true, here is what you need to do about it.

And the application comes with these three *“let us”* statements in the next few verses. As I understand it, these are the three commands in this passage. And I point this out, because sometimes verses 24-25 are ripped out of context to try to prove that we need to come together to worship as a congregation. And this is certainly part of it (we will get to this toward the end of our study), but if that’s all this passage is known for, I think we’ve missed the main point here. The commands are in the *“let us”* statements. And while I have these highlighted, I should also point out that these three statements (or commands) are based in *“faith,” “hope,”* and *“love.”* Paul talks about *“faith, hope, and love,”* and I just think it’s interesting that these three commands are not random, but are structured around *“faith,”* and *“hope,”* and *“love.”* So, for the rest of our time together this morning, let’s work our way through these three commands.

- I. **And we start in verse 22 with a command that almost sounds like an invitation: LET US DRAW NEAR WITH A SINCERE HEART IN FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH, HAVING OUR HEARTS SPRINKLED CLEAN FROM AN EVIL CONSCIENCE AND OUR BODIES WASHED WITH PURE WATER.**

And so, we have a standing invitation to draw near to God. The door is open, come on in! Jesus has already prepared the way, and now he is inviting us to draw near. And let’s remember: This is written to Christians! Sometimes, even as God’s people, we need the reminder to *“draw near.”* Sometimes we drift, we get tired, we wander, we get disillusioned by sin, and we need the command, we need the invitation, to *“draw near,”* to come back, to come close to God. And the invitation is open to all of us. If you’re a teen and you’ve disrespected your parents this week, you can start over. If you’ve given in (yet again) to some kind of sinful addiction, God invites you to make a fresh start. If Jesus has made a way (which he has), it only makes sense to step through the door that he’s opened. As James explains in James 4:7-10, *“Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.”*

We draw near to God, the writer of Hebrews says, *“with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”* We aren’t sneaking into God’s presence, but we are invited in, because God has cleansed our hearts. We respond to his invitation with faith, we come to God with sincere and open hearts, he cleanses our conscience as our bodies are washed with pure water, in what appears to be a reference to our obedience to the gospel in the act of baptism. In fact, this is very much parallel to what Peter says in 1 Peter 3:21, where he says, *“Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* Baptism, then, is our *“appeal to God for a good conscience.”* God does the work, God does the cleansing, but we call out for it, we *“appeal to God for a good conscience”* in the act of baptism. So also here in Hebrews, we draw near to God in faith, our hearts are sprinkled clean, and our bodies are washed with pure water. The command in this passage, though, is to *“draw near.”*

II. As we continue in this text, we come to the second command in this passage (the second “let us”), as the author says (in verse 23), **“LET US HOLD FAST THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE WITHOUT WAVERING, FOR HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL.”**

So, the command is that we are to *“hold fast,”* we are to hold on, and we are to hold on *“without wavering,”* or *“without bending”* (as some translations might have it). And if we have to be told to hold on, it’s pretty safe to assume that it’s possible to NOT hold on, or to let go. In other words, when we first obey the gospel, that’s just the beginning. When we summarize God’s plan of salvation on the wall up here at the beginning of every lesson, we obviously focus on hearing and believing the gospel, we focus on repentance, and confession, and baptism, but let’s not forget that last little bullet point up there: We must then “live for Jesus.” And that step right there will keep us engaged for a lifetime. That last step is from here on out! We come to faith in Jesus, we obey the gospel, and then we hang on! We *“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”* As I understand it, the *“confession of our hope”* is probably a reference to the *“good confession,”* that statement we make before we’re baptized, that we believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. We might compare that statement to the vows we made at our wedding. It’s a promise that hold onto from here on out. And if we’re ever tempted to wander in our marriage, we think back to that promise that we made. The same is true here, we are to *“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”*

And notice: The reason given for our holding fast is that *“He who promised is faithful.”* It’s not about us! I may doubt, and slip, and fall, but he never will, *“for He who promised is faithful.”* So, we must *“draw near,”* and we must *“hold fast.”*

III. As we come to the last two verses in this passage, we come to the final “let us” as the author says (in verses 24-25), **“AND LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIMULATE ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD DEEDS, NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER, AS IS THE HABIT OF SOME, BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER; AND ALL THE MORE AS YOU SEE THE DAY DRAWING NEAR.”**

What is the actual command here? What are we to do? The command is, we are to *“consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.”* I hope we notice, the command is not that we are to “go to church” (as this passage is sometimes used), but the command is to encourage each other, which we do by assembling together. Do we see a slight difference between what this verse actually says and how this verse is sometimes used? The emphasis is on *“encouraging.”*

The word that’s translated here as *“encouraging”* is a word that refers to “calling somebody to your side.” In my mind, it’s putting your arm around somebody’s shoulder as you stand beside them. We need this done for us, and we need to do this for others. And notice: We are to *“consider”* how to do this. We are to think very carefully about it, we are to “brainstorm” how to be more effective at *“stimulating”* or *“provoking”* each other to love and good deeds. To “provoke” is often used in a negative context, “Somebody provoked me into hitting them,” one nation “provoked” another nation into war, and so on. I think of those trips to Lake Superior we took as kids. Mom and dad were in the front seat, but in the back seat, my sister and I were responsible for provoking each other the whole time. I remember the trip where dad finally put a line of masking tape right down the middle of the back seat of the old ‘79 Plymouth Volaré. It wasn’t long before my sister started screaming about my arm hair being on her side of the line. I had provoked her, hadn’t I? But here, in this context, we stimulate, we provoke each other to love and good deeds. We get creative. We think about it. Instead of irritating each other, we do whatever we can possibly do to encourage each other. What one person needs to be encouraged may not be the same as what some other person needs to be encouraged.

This is one of many *“one another”* passages in the New Testament. We are to provoke or stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

But then we have this warning and this encouragement that does transcend time and culture, and it comes (first) in the form of a warning, *“not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some.”* So, thinking back to the people who heard this or read this for the very first time, some of those early Christians were starting to avoid the assemblies of the church. To *“forsake”* is to abandon or desert, to leave behind. Have we ever been left behind? Every once in a while, a kid may get left behind at church. Not good! It doesn't feel good to get left behind. Or we might think of a soldier on the battlefield, in the heat of it, who suddenly decides, “I don't think this is for me,” and heads out for McDonald's. He has *“forsaken”* his position. In the same way, it's possible to *“forsake”* or to “leave behind” the assemblies of the congregation. Maybe we get out of the habit, maybe something we think is more important comes up, and after a few weeks or months we look back, and “Oh no,” we have forsaken the assembling of ourselves together. It happens, and so the author of Hebrews warns us about it here.

Why is this so dangerous? Well, when we come together as a church, that's how we encourage each other; that's how we stimulate each other to love and good deeds. Sometimes, we may look at this passage, and we may come to the conclusion: We need to assemble together to be encouraged. And that's true, but that's not really what this text actually says, is it? No. We assemble together to do the encouraging! Somebody may say, “I don't need to assemble to be encouraged.” But that's not what this verse says. This verse says that you need to assemble together to encourage others. This isn't about me; this is about everybody else. This is outward focused. This isn't about me being encouraged; this is about me encouraging others. And so, if I decide to do something of lesser importance on a Lord's Day morning, I'm not just missing out myself, but I am limiting my ability to encourage others. When you're not here, I don't hear your singing. When you're not here, I don't hear your “amen” after the prayer. When you're not here, I don't see your smile, I don't feel your hand on my shoulder, I don't sense your concern about me.

And this has been a real challenge over the past few years, hasn't it? We thank God that several of our young adults figured out how to live-stream our worship assemblies just a few months before the pandemic. We thank God that we can call in and listen to worship. It blows my mind that church can call us. The phone rings, we pick up, and there's a Bible class on the line. How amazing! And we are thankful for those opportunities. Those who are sick or vulnerable can join in online or on the phone. We have people joining in from far off places all the time. And that's great. But what are we missing if that's all we get? Personal contact! Hugs and handshakes! The communal aspect of the Lord's Supper! The reciprocal nature of singing. Yes, you can hear singing at home, but I can't hear you, and that is a huge part of it. We miss those conversations that happen off to the side. This is huge, and this is one of the main ways we accomplish this command to encourage. By the way, this is one reason why I think it's so important that we end our class on time. Yes, our class time is important (we're studying the word of God), but that fellowship that happens between class and worship is also incredibly important.

The command in this passage, then, is that we are to get creative in how we stimulate one another to love and good deeds. A big part of this happens in the assembly (that's why it's so dangerous to forsake the assembling of ourselves together), but I would also point out that it's possible to assemble together WITHOUT obeying this command. Do we see that in this passage? If the command were simply to assemble together, we could do that by simply showing up. But since the command is to encourage, it may be possible for me to show up at the assembly without fulfilling the command. And that's not good! Somebody compared it to going to the gym and sitting on a weight bench while sipping a milkshake. If I do that, have I worked out? Not exactly! Maybe if

the milkshake was heavy enough, but not exactly! Some of you know that we've been swimming three days a week for several months now. They have a really nice hot tub down at the pool in Oregon. Have I worked out if I go to the pool and just sit in the hot tub for half an hour? Not really! In the same way, it's possible to come to an assembly like this one, to sit here for an hour, and to leave without actually doing what this passage is commanding us to do. Again, the command is not to assemble, but the command is to consider how to stimulate and encourage each other.

We must be intentional. We have to think about it. On the way here every Lord's Day morning, be thinking about who you may need to encourage and how you plan on doing that. Years ago, I started writing down names in the upper right-hand corner of my sermon notes: These are the people I want to make sure to check in with today. Otherwise, I may just get caught up in the busy-ness of the day, and even as the preacher, even as a shepherd, I may actually come and go on the Lord's Day without actually accomplishing too much. Another thing I started doing several years ago is to pause as I unlock the church building every Sunday morning around 6:45. Before I come in, I normally put my hand on the door, and I pray for everyone who will enter this building, that no one intending harm will be allowed to enter, and that all of us may be able to encourage each other while we are here. That's just what I do; you may find some way to do this on your own. And we also need to find ways of doing this outside the assembly – in our homes, in the community, or even in this building but outside our normal assembly times. Sometimes I think about having coffee and donuts every Sunday morning at 9 for some bonus fellowship. The problem is: We have a hard time finding people to clean our facility as it is. I hesitate to create any additional messes without the manpower to clean it up. Maybe this is something we can aim for in the future. But we need to be together, and we need to be encouraging each other spiritually. And this is specific. Talking about sports or the weather may be a good start, but that's not us stimulating each other to love and good deeds. It needs to move beyond that – truly listening to each other, praying for and with each other, encouraging each other, truly caring for each other, asking how somebody's doing spiritually.

For just a moment, I want to invite you to imagine walking into the Post Office, and you see somebody absolutely struggling with a huge pile of packages, even to the point where they can't even see where they're going. Or maybe it's the grocery store, and you see somebody trying to find their car, and they have bags hanging off of every finger. I think most of us would hopefully at least think about offering to help. I always end up helping people get stuff off the top shelves at various stores. It's part of the tall guy oath I took way back when. But if somebody's struggling, and if we can help, we should. Well, in the same way, we have people here this morning (I guarantee it) who are barely keeping it together (spiritually, emotionally, maybe physically). We have caretakers who are nearly overwhelmed. We have people struggling with chronic and invisible illnesses. We have people struggling with various addictions. We have people struggling with relationship issues, trouble with their children, stress at work, taking care of elderly parents, some who may be struggling with doubt or guilt over past sins, and those issues are just as real (if not more so) than the elderly woman trying to make it from her car to the post office with a stack of packages taller than she is. And just as most of us would offer to help in that situation, so also we should be just as willing to step in to encourage someone spiritually.

I want to encourage you to read the article on the front of today's bulletin, written by a friend and gospel preacher who was diagnosed with ALS a year or two ago. He's in the late stages, and today he writes about going to his very last worship assembly. It's hurting him more than the disease itself, but I hope you'll be encouraged by what he's written, and I hope all of us might take the time to "consider" (to brainstorm) what we might be able to do to encourage each other, especially those who can no longer come to worship in person. One thing I loved about worshipping in South Beloit last Sunday was that they had just had a potluck

dinner with one of their senior saints in a nursing home. She can no longer come to worship with them, and so they took worship and the potluck to her and sang together as well. What an encouragement that must have been, but that took some consideration, didn't it? Somebody had to think of that and then do it.

By the way, what is *"the day"* that's drawing near (at the end of verse 25)? In my opinion, it's probably the Judgment Day? But I don't know for sure. It may be a reference to the Lord's Day, it may be a reference to the coming destruction of Jerusalem, it may be a reference to the day of our own death. But whatever it is, the author is motivating us to be intentional with the encouraging we do. It is urgent.

Conclusion:

As we close, I hope we notice how communal all of this is. All three of these *"let us"* statements are things that we do together as a group. I think I counted at least 14 references to *"us"* in this passage: Let us draw near, let us hold fast, and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our assembling together, but encouraging each other.

Before John leads us in a song to prepare us for the Lord's Supper, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

You are a God who encourages, and we are thankful that you've give us this passage from Hebrews, encouraging us to draw near, to hang on, and to lift each other up. Thank you, Father, for allowing us to be together this morning. We with those who are unable to assemble with us today. Forgive us when we fall short. We pray for new opportunities to encourage each other.

We come to you today through Jesus, our great high priest who has made salvation possible. Lord, come quickly! AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com