

*Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Hebrews 10:11-25 (EHV)**

11 In the one case, every priest stood ministering day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which are never able to remove sin. 12 In the other case, this priest, after he offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since then he has been waiting until his enemies are made a footstool under his feet. 14 By only one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being sanctified.

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies in Scripture to us, for first he said:

16 This is the covenant I will make with them after those days, says the Lord.

I will put my laws on their hearts

and I will write them on their mind. Jer 31:33

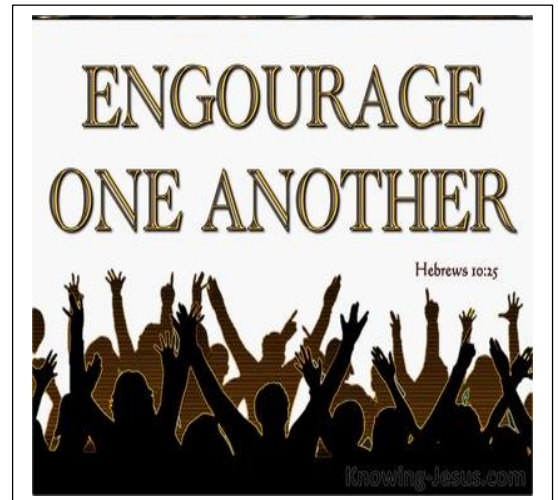
17 Then he adds:

And I will not remember their sins and their lawlessness any longer.

Jer 31:34

18 Now where these sins are forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

19 Brothers, we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place through the blood of Jesus. 20 It is a new and living way he opened for us through the curtain, that is, his flesh. 21 We also have a great priest over the house of God. 22 So let us approach with a sincere heart, in the full confidence of faith, because our hearts have been sprinkled to take away a bad conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold on firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, since he who promised is faithful.



*Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may have confidence to gather in your holy presence with all your people who have been purified by the water and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

The preacher whose words have been written down in this letter to the Hebrews urges God's people not to neglect meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. It's possible this leads us to wonder why some people aren't here and may unfortunately lead us to consider ourselves better than them because we're here and they're not.

There are many reasons why people don't gather with us in worship anymore. Here are a few possible reasons:

1. There are so many other exciting and valuable things to do with our time and energy, such as golf, fishing, sport, time with family, or a sleep-in. We're never going to be able to compete with such things, and we're never told to do so in the Bible.
2. With the advent of livestreamed worship services, we were once encouraged to do 'church' from the comfort of our own homes. None of this sitting in uncomfortable pews – we can sit in the comfort of our own lounge chairs with a home-made cuppa and piece of toast in our hands. We wouldn't have to put up with the local pastor and his choice of hymns and songs, but we can select our favourite preacher and worship service style. What's even better is that we wouldn't have to worry about that pesky offering bowl or fear bumping into those people who offend us. We'll never be asked to serve on any committees or attend any meetings. We could even scroll forward to our favourite bits and leave the worship service early without anyone knowing. While this is a helpful option to the housebound, if this is how we choose to worship regularly, we'd be denying ourselves some of the most valuable aspects of true Christian worship.
3. There are many well-meaning Christian sayings which seem to encourage people to stay away from gathering physically for worship, such as: 'The church isn't a building, but a people' and 'You don't have to gather for worship to be the church', or even, 'Don't go to church; be the church!' Even the common statement that you don't have to go to church to be a Christian

encourages us to disobey God's call to gather with his people and receive his holy gifts.

4. Perhaps the saddest reason why people aren't gathering with us this morning is that we've chased them away by our unchristian actions, words, and attitudes. If this is the case, we may ask God to lead us to repent of these things and help us reconcile with them. We should also ask for the Holy Spirit to guide us so that we might live out our faith with more gracious and loving attitudes.

But then again, since we haven't neglected meeting for worship today, why are we here?

For some reason I don't think it's because we like sitting on these uncomfortable pews, or because we like getting the exercise of standing and sitting like jack-in-the-boxes, or because we like singing hymns and songs that no-one else in society would sing, or even because we all like each other.

Maybe some of us are here out of habit. Maybe some of us are here because our family and friends are here. Maybe some of us are here because we figure God wants us here.

Sometimes we might be tempted to change what we do in worship in the hope more people will gather with us. This rarely works, and if it does, it doesn't always result in faithfully mature Christians. This also isn't the approach the preacher adopts whose words were written down for us in the letter to the Hebrews. Instead, he gives us heavenly reasons why anyone would gather physically for worship, and it may not be what we expect!

Firstly, he focusses a lot on the forgiveness of sin. He describes some of the details of the Old sacrificial system where the high priest, having been purified with water, would enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement each year. The blood of animals, shed for the forgiveness of the sins of the priest and the people, would be spread on the ground, the Ark of the Covenant, the furnishings, the priest, and the people to make them pure and holy. Of course, the effectiveness of these sacrifices wouldn't last and would need to be repeated every year.

But now a new high priest, Jesus Christ, has entered into the heavenly sanctuary with his own sacrificial blood. He only needed to do this once for all time because his blood is pure, innocent, and holy, unlike the blood of animals. The heavenly results of his bloody sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins is given to you and me today in our earthly worship. We can't get this heavenly forgiveness anywhere else in the world.

We approach God, having been baptised with the holy waters of baptism, with complete confidence knowing he longs to forgive us our sins, after all, this is why Jesus came to earth. Jesus comes to us today to proclaim God no longer remembers our sins and our lawlessness.

In other words, while we might beat ourselves up for our failures and faults, and everyone else will seek to judge and punish us for what we've done wrong, God doesn't. Instead, God forgives. God no longer holds anything against us. God says there's nothing bad left to punish us for. We may still remember how we've failed, but God chooses not to remember or dwell on anything we've done. This in turn also helps us not to dwell on, or regret, our past. It's forgiven. It's no longer remembered.

Then the preacher talks about how this affects our conscience, our hearts, and our minds.

When the preacher talks about our conscience, he's referring to that inner part of ourselves which determines right from wrong, a bit like our own internal court of law which almost endlessly cross-examines our own and each other's words and actions. Not only this, but it also judges and decides what the punishment should be for all those who have done wrong, including oneself.

When our own conscience submits to the merciful ruling of the heavenly courts as our great High Priest, Judge, and King, announces our own sins are forgiven and no longer remembered, and that the holy and innocent blood of Jesus is sprinkled on our hearts whenever we eat and drink his holy body and blood for

the forgiveness of all our sins, we may receive a good and clean conscience, no longer troubled by the past.

In our world which suffers from a lot of mental health issues, such as despair, anxiousness, and uncertainty, we might wonder whether some of these issues have been misdiagnosed. Perhaps they're not all mental health issues. Some of them could be spiritual issues because so many have troubled, burdened, guilty, and unclean consciences. Perhaps what people need is a good dose of forgiveness which we receive right here in our Christian worship!

Then, as people who have received and believed the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus, we hold fast to our confession of faith in Jesus. We strengthen each other by confessing this faith together. We confess God himself provides his own Son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins, for our salvation, and for the gift of eternal life through faith in him. We confess God still gathers us into his Church to serve and equip us as his holy people.

Next, the preacher tells us to stir up or provoke each other.

This doesn't mean we're to look down on each other, assume the worst of each other, negatively assess each other, and habitually use a lot of sarcasm to get under each other's skin! After all, this type of critical and judgmental behaviour only ensures people will be discouraged in their faith and our churches will continue to decline and eventually close.

Instead, we're to stir up and provoke each other *toward love and good deeds*.

So, how are we to 'provoke' each other toward love?

Well, passing on the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ would be a good start! We're to encourage each other in our faith in Jesus Christ who forgives and no longer remembers our sin. We're to encourage the people around us to have a good, clean conscience as we remind each other our sins are fully forgiven and no longer remembered by God. We're to encourage each other by the way we too forgive them as we've been forgiven by Christ. We're to consider the needs of those around us as greater and more important than our own needs and willingly serve them. We're to love and serve them in the same way Jesus loves and serves us and gave up his life for us.

All these things, done in faith and love, isn't experienced anywhere else on earth.

For example, whenever we play sport, or go fishing or golfing, or when we sleep in on Sunday mornings, we don't receive the forgiveness of sins and a good clean conscience.

Whenever we watch online worship services or stay at home thinking we don't need to go to church to be a Christian, we don't receive any face-to-face encouragement in faith and love and service we need from our fellow Christians.

This doesn't mean we Christians always do this well, but if we can't get this in the Christian church, where else on earth can we go to get this?

There are many reasons one might not go to church, but we'd be foolishly missing out on all the heavenly gifts of forgiveness, a clean conscience, peace in mind and heart as the blood of Jesus cleanses us, and the mutual encouragement in faith from fellow Christians. These are God's chosen means of grace which we receive in faith through our earthly worship.

This is why the preacher urges us not to neglect meeting together in worship, face to face, to receive God's heavenly gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation. Here in our worship our consciences, hearts, and minds are cleansed and renewed in faith knowing our sins are truly forgiven. Here in our worship our faith in

God is encouraged and strengthened. Here in our worship, we get to encourage each other through our faith-stirring mutual conversations and consolations until we meet again in God's holy presence next week.

*And in this way may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding and comforts our consciences, will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

Pastor Stuart Kleinig  
South Burnett Lutheran Parish  
26<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (P28)  
17<sup>th</sup> November 2024