

The 20th Sunday after Pentecost
October 3, 2021

“Brethren, exhort one another daily to be steadfast in Christ to the end”
(Hebrews 3:12-13)

By Rev. Ed Weber

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,
Today’s text for this 20th Sunday after Pentecost is from our Epistle reading – Hebrews 3:12-14.

“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”

Here ends our text.

It used to be that the Rio Grande Valley was known as the land of “mañana”. Why rush things? There’s always tomorrow. With this worldwide pandemic, the whole world has become the land of “mañana”, the land of tomorrow. I scheduled a veterinarian appointment back in August that will finally be coming up this month of October. I’ve heard many of our members tell their stories about not being able to get doctors’ appointments for 2 to 3 months into the future. Car dealership salespeople have to tell their customers that the cars are still “in transit”. It’s a random luck of the draw which dealership gets their new vehicles in.

Oh how we miss the good old days of “mañana”. Tomorrow was still a whole lot better than 2 to 3 months from now!

Our text tells us that when it comes to spiritual matters of the soul, the “mañana” way of thinking is very dangerous. “Beware, brethren...”, begins our text. There’s one thing that can’t be put off until tomorrow...because there might not be a tomorrow. And then it will be too late. What can’t be put off? The return from “departing from the living God”...the repentance of a heart of unbelief!

There is no greater evil than unbelief. For a heart hardened by the deceitfulness of sin is no longer the throne of the Holy Spirit, but of the devil. And God is indeed living and just and He will punish all who reject Him.

So we read seven chapters later in Hebrews 10 some very harsh words against unbelief.

“26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 28 Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:26-31)

A fearful thing...In this month where its popular to go to places that promise to scare you. You can go to Six Flags over Texas in Arlington and get the Haunted House add on to your admission. Fright Fest is what it’s called. Closer to home is the Toluca Ranch Haunted House in Weslaco. Yes, you can enjoy having people jump out at you knowing that they can’t hurt you and especially have to observe Covid-19 safe distancing. It’s all costume fun, designed to get the heart racing.

But, to fall into the hands of the living God is not fun and games. For if one has received the knowledge of the truth and then willfully sins, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. Why? The sacrifice, the Son of God, has been trampled underfoot. Jesus death on the cross is counted a common thing. And the Spirit of grace who is rejected from the heart is insulted. What remains then? Vengeance. God’s vengeance, not ours. The Lord’s judgment, not ours.

Today can’t be put off until tomorrow if a Christian has fallen into unbelief! The fearful thing in the hands of God awaits.

Scripture doesn’t teach the dangerous doctrine of complacency “once saved, always saved” like some erring churches do. What Scripture does teach is daily exhortation by the brethren. **“exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today’”.**

But, does that mean that I'm judging my brother? No, you're exhorting him or her to come back to Jesus. That's what the verb means that is being used here, "parkaleo". It literally means to call an unbeliever back to one's side, Jesus' side, the side where there is life and light and salvation and no judgment for sin. It is the side where Jesus sacrifice on the cross is treasured, and not made common.

It is the side where a sinner becomes a partaker of Christ our text says. A Christian becomes united with Christ through faith. Listen how Chapter 3 of Hebrews begins.

**“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.”
(Hebrews 3:1-2)**

The brethren, you and me, are called holy brethren, because we have been partakers of the heavenly calling. Our confession is Christ Jesus, the Apostle, the sent One from God, the High Priest, who was faithful to God the Father.

The house that truly gets the adrenaline pumping is not a haunted house. It is the House of God. It is the communion of saints, the house made up of all believers of which Moses was faithful in serving. For Moses pointed the people to the coming sacrifice, Jesus.

Who built the house? Moses? No, he was but a servant. Jesus built the house! Listen as Hebrews chapter 3 continues.

“For this One (Jesus) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. 5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”

“We are” the house of God, partakers of Jesus, built as living stones upon the Chief Cornerstone. But again, Scripture doesn't teach “once saved, always saved”. But Scriptures tell us that we will remain part of God's house if we hold fast the confidence in Jesus and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Hebrews was written to the Jewish converts before the fall of the temple in 70 AD. They were persecuted to give up their faith and go back to Old Covenant, and the “glorious” temple worship instead of meeting in humble homes. Hebrews is a call especially to these new Jewish Christians, who have such a noble beginning, to reach their end of the heavenly calling.

“All hands on deck” is the call to exhort, implore, beseech, and urge one another to remain steadfast to Christ! This call to exhort one another is given to the brethren. This is part of one’s calling to look out for one another, daily. Exhort one another, daily. Strengthen one another with God’s word, daily. Yes, the pastor is called to shepherd the flock, but we see that he is aided by not just the elders, but all the brethren. It’s your job, just like the early Christians to daily lift up each other in the faith. If someone is being drawn away by the world and is no longer showing interest in weekly worship, then each of the believers is called to exhort him or her to come back.

“Parakaleo” – Come back to our side! Come back to Jesus side for you are walking dangerously close to unbelief!

In this time of Covid, there has been a disruption of weekly worship. We’ve had to use electronic means for health safety. And there is still fear to come to large gatherings. Especially, we need all hands on deck, by the holy brethren to each do one’s part in keeping in contact with the house of God, the believers. It’s very important to share God’s word with those who are not comfortable assembling with the saints yet.

Hebrews 10 goes on to remind us these important words.

“Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

37 “For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.” (Hebrews 10:35-39)

Endurance. Yet a little while, is our exhortation. Your exhortation to one another. He’s coming and won’t tarry. You are justified in Christ as you live by faith. Don’t

ever give up so great a treasure! Don't draw back for then only perdition awaits. But be of those who believe to the saving of the soul!

Today, not mañana, the Holy Spirit tells us, as we hear in Hebrews 3.

“Today, if you will hear His voice, 8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, And saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was angry with that generation, And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart, And they have not known My ways.’ 11 So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest.’ ” (Hebrews 3:7-10)

Oh, how God was patient with the Israelites and yet they continued in unbelief. They did not enter rest not only in the promised land, but eternal rest in heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul warns us of their falling to keep us firm in the faith.

“As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” 8 Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now, all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

In all things, though, we can count on the Author and Finisher of our faith to be faithful to us. (Hebrews 12:2). He will not forsake us or leave us. (Hebrews 13:5) He promises to not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able.

“12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:12-13)

Yes, our Apostle, High Priest, Jesus, is faithful to the house He built. He is faithful to keep His people in the faith until He returns. He graciously has given us His word and sacraments to uphold us. He gives us not just pastors, but all the holy brethren, all of you to exhort one another daily.

“Today”, Jesus said to Zacchaeus who had been led away from the faith by coveting riches.

“Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house.” (Luke 19:5)

Oh, they complained that Jesus was going to the house of a sinner! How did Jesus reply?

“Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:9-10)

And today, salvation has come to this house of God, to all of us sinners. For Jesus has sought and saved us who were lost and continues to do so. Salvation has come to each of you, His brethren, fellow partakers of the heavenly calling. Salvation has come to you, so that you would remain steadfast until His coming, exhorting one another that no one would be lost as you wait! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your heart and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)