**Hebrews 10:11-14** November 18, 2018

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Saints Triumphant, ET-3

*Hebrews 10:11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

If you go to the grocery store, when do you get home? That seems obvious, even if a little strange—When you come in the front door. But here is a trickier question: what if you are on a long journey for weeks far far away, when do you get home? Is it when you drive in the driveway? When you enter the city limits of Radcliff? Could you maybe imagine saying to the family when you have crossed the I-65 Kennedy Bridge, up there in Louisville 47 miles from your house, could you imagine saying, “We’re home”? Or how about returning from an 11 month deployment, have you heard someone say, “We’re home!” when the plane hits the American tarmac, even if it is thousands of miles from your house?

**Home! But Not Yet**

There is a hymn that sings “Heav’n is my home.” Christians can rightly think of the end of life as the time when we get to go home. It is well and good to think in those terms. For was it not Jesus Christ himself who said, *“In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me”* (John 14:2-3). Heaven will be our home. It already is the home of many loved ones who have gone before us.

Heaven is the hope of a great many people on this earth. If you ask people if they are going to get to God’s kingdom beyond this world, a great many people will say, “I hope so!” Even many Christians will say that. “I hope so.”

Today’s reading is proof that God does not want your answer to be, “I hope so.” God wants us to be certain that we will be there with those who have gone before us. But that certainty is not because God just takes everyone into heaven, as is the popular opinion. Jesus said that heaven is not to be taken for granted. *“Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it”* (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus says that most people will not end up in heaven. But that does not mean that he wants people to be uncertain. What parent wants their child uncertain of their love? And our good God wants us certain of our place in heaven and to joy in that confidence.

This book of the Bible called Hebrews is a letter to people who forgot what they had in Christ Jesus. And they forgot that it was Christ Jesus who had given them these things.

It wasn’t just that they were forgetful people, they had reasons to forget. Pressure was being applied. These Christians were persecuted. We really don’t know if this was an empire-wide persecution or a localized one, but this group of Christians had felt some real pain because of their faith. Some had been publicly ridiculed, a few had been imprisoned, some even had their property confiscated. I mean, that starts to hurt, when the achievement of years of blood, sweat and tears is simply ripped out of your hands and you are powerless to do anything about it.

So these persecuted Christians started to hedge their bets. Like Jesus and all his disciples, these Christians were Jewish Christians. They grew up with the temple worship, daily sacrifices, dietary rules, resting on the Sabbath, the whole nine yards. *And the Jews were not being persecuted*! So they started to cover their bets and thought, “If I can get out of public insult, imprisonment and confiscation of property by going back to Judaism, why not? If the Jewish faith was good enough in the past, let’s go back.”

What is that old Gospel song? “Give me that old time religion…” How does it go? “It was good for our mothers… It has saved our fathers… And it’s good enough for me.” That’s what these Jewish Christians were thinking. “Let’s just go back to the old way. After all, the Old Testament is God’s word too!”

The entire book of Hebrews refutes that looking over the shoulder. Our reading compares the old faith with the new faith. So how does the old faith compare? Listen, ***“Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus] had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.”***

The Old Testament Aaronic priesthood was just a placeholder. It was a substitute teacher. And once the real teacher (Jesus) got there, the substitute teacher went home. Every morning the Aaronic priest had gotten up, went to the temple and slaughtered a lamb for the sins of Israel. Every evening he had to do the same thing again. Twelve hours later, he found himself again at the altar with the slaying knife in his hand. Twelve hours later, again. It didn’t end. It went on like that for centuries. And the Hebrews writer asks those wavering Jewish Christians: Why do you want to go back to that, to those sacrifices ***“which can never take away sin.”***

“You have a better priest than that! He was the Son of God who came into this world. He was tempted like all the rest of us, except he never gave in to those temptations. He went to the cross. He suffered death. He gave himself as the sacrifice for sin, and because he is the Son of God, his one act of sacrifice was enough. All your sins are forgiven. You can’t go back now because all the Old Testament stuff was pointing to this guy. And if you go back to all those substitutes and shadows, you are doing a Judas or a Peter. Remember how Judas betrayed Jesus? Remember how Peter denied Jesus? No. You can’t go back now.”

Thankfully, you and I don’t face what these people faced. We may face some problems. There are people who may mock us for our faith. But we have not yet gotten to the point of imprisonment or expropriation.

Yet we too, for different reasons, need to be reminded. We look back on life and worry over our failures, and those failures seem to fill the sky above us and choke the air we breathe. We feel guilty over the sins of the past and think about the day, the moment, even the single impulse that we wish we could have back and undo and redo. We look at life and see all the just plain hard things of life like health issues or friend issues or money issues and we start to feel the water coming up over our neck, like we are going to drown, and we need to run or despair or end it all. “That sin and grace stuff, that heaven and hell stuff – it’s all well and good, but I got bigger stuff to worry about.”

Look. Where are you going to be in a hundred years? A thousand years from now? Eternity matters a whole lot more than the things that are demanding time in your life, and God wants us to be certain about that one thing needful. ***“By one sacrifice [Jesus] has made [you] perfect forever.”*** Heaven is your home address. Jesus has given it to you.

But there is a mystery rests in that verse. ***“By one sacrifice he [Jesus Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”*** “He has made them perfect forever” and “those who are being made holy.” If Jesus has made them perfect (past tense), then why are they being made holy (present tense). It sounds like “done” and “not done”.

What we have here are two of the big Christian teachings (represented by two big words): justification and sanctification.

What is justification? You know well the story of Jesus dying on the cross. And if you have ever been to a Good Friday service, you know well some of the very last words Jesus spoke before he died. He said, *“It is finished.”* When Jesus said, “It is finished” it wasn’t like Jesus was saying, “I give up” or some other futile gasp of failure. He was saying, “I have completed the mission.”

Though it doesn’t come out in the English, in the Greek language of the Bible, the “It is finished” is the same word in this passage in Hebrews 10, ***“By one sacrifice he has made [you] perfect forever.”*** Jesus’ work on the cross completed our salvation, and God counts us holy. That’s justification.

“Justification” should bring to your mind’s eye a judge at the bench. After hearing the testimony he declares, “I find the defendant not guilty.” He pounds the gavel; trial over. We are free.

Understanding justification is important because some people, some Christians, portray being saved as a process that takes a lifetime to accomplish. But what if I am a sinful person who sins every day of my life, and I am! If it depends on me…

Others say that being saved is a feeling. But what about when I have a bad day, a bad week, a bad decade, and I don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel? Must not be saved, right? ’Cuz you should feel it, right?

Others say that Jesus made a down payment on your sin, but if you want real forgiveness you need to off-set the bad stuff with good stuff. But what if I don’t or don’t get around to it or don’t do enough?

All of these are false teachings about being saved are clearly contradicted in our reading’s description of justification. “Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, has made a once for all sacrifice for sin that is complete.” That is justification. That gives us hope on the bad days. That tells us that our worst of sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus. Justification tells us that the *truth* of God’s forgiveness trumps my *feelings* of unworthiness.

***[Jesus Christ] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” “Those who are being made holy”*** is talking about sanctification. Because I have been justified, now I live out my salvation. It’s not just that I have seen the light, I *live* like someone who has seen the light. Forgiveness was credited to me the moment God made me his own through baptism, or the moment the Holy Spirit worked faith in your heart. But my sanctification is an on-going process. Being human, I will always do things imperfect and sinful. But I pray to God that I will do better and better each day. At first as a Christian, I clear the field of the trees, and then it will be the smaller bushes. But year after year, day after day, I continue weeding out the sin that pops up. God-willing I will do that well, but that is not what saves me. That is what I do in response to being saved.

This is the opposite way how we naturally think of justification and sanctification. We naturally expect things to follow a cause and effect. I work hard, I get good grades. I punch the time clock, I get paid. I do what God says, God rewards me with eternal life—so we think.

This is why the theme of this sermon is **Home! But not Yet.** Heaven is already ours. Christ has achieved it. The ticket has been booked and paid for. And now while waiting in the train station for that train to heaven to come along, it is your privilege to act, to smile, to love, like people who know where they will be spending eternity. Amen.