

This Sunday's texts:

Daniel 12:1-3

Hebrews 10:11-25

Mark 13:1-13

The Power of Hope

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The holy gospel according to Mark, the 13th chapter:

As Jesus was leaving the temple, one of the disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!" "Do you see all these great buildings?" Jesus replied. "Not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?" Jesus said to them, "Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me, you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand what to say. Just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death and father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

The gospel of the Lord.

It's been a tough week and it's not because of the microphone. I got a problem with my wife this week. Almost every day this week she has beat me to the coffee pot and you do realize that the Bible teaches that it is the man's responsibility to make the coffee. Right? That's because the Bible has "He-brews" in it. [groans] Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate the groan.

I am actually looking today at Hebrews. I find it a wonderful text that we're looking at today. Not just the text itself, but also the context of that text which I think is a powerful word

for us to think about what it means to be the people of God. In Galatians, it says among other things, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.” This isn't Hebrews; this is Galatians. It's just a setup. “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather serve one another humbly in love.”¹ We want to see today what it means for us to be forgiven, not just from sin, but for life in Christ. How do we understand what it is that God has us to do as we live out our lives, following this incredible promise of forgiveness that is ours?

There are these two texts that go together in Hebrews 10 this morning. The first is “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”² And then it's followed by “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”³ Those two ideas are critically connected for us. So I want us to remember and think about this one, “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.” In the journey of this church year, we come to the day of Pentecost, which happened to be the first day we were able to be back inside the church. Then there's week and week and week after week of what's sometimes called Ordinary Time or the season of Pentecost. We go through that time having looked at the first part of the year at the life and teachings of Jesus. In the second part of the year, we're looking at how do we be the church? How do we follow Jesus? That's sort of the way the focus of the church year unfolds each year. But we also sometimes interrupt that journey. We've done that the last two weeks, starting with Reformation Sunday and then last week with All Saints Sunday. I think those are critical interruptions for our understanding of these texts.

This moving on of the text to suggest that we consider how we might spur one another on to love and good works is rooted in the former verse. It's rooted in our understanding of who we are in Christ and how God is faithful in his forgiveness, in his cleansing of our sin. So again, we want to hold fast. We want to be confident, holding on to the hope that is ours because God is faithful.

¹ Galatians 5:13

² Hebrews 10:23

³ Hebrews 10:24

There's a corrective there in our thinking because sometimes what we think we need to hold fast to is our own personal disciplines of life. Sometimes, what we think we need to hold fast to is *our* faithfulness in following Christ. But that's not the source of our hope, as we looked at so clearly in the last several weeks. In Hebrews, there's this buildup that comes before chapter 10. It is a buildup that talks about the movement between the sacrifices of the Old Testament and how they cleansed or purified people for this brief segment of time and then how that moved into Christ and the sacrifice of the Messiah for us that creates forgiveness of sin once and for all time. It talks about the imperfection of the Old Testament sacrificial system, coming to perfection in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That death and resurrection of Jesus is our assurance that we are in fact forgiven. Jesus is the source of our hope, not our lifestyles, not our choices, but what Jesus has done for us.

We talked about that on Reformation Sunday and some of you were a little taken aback as I talked about the importance of recognizing that God declares you not simply forgiven, but forgiven and righteous. You see, if we look in the mirror, if we look to our history and we base our understanding of who we are on our history, we are not righteous. We are not forgiven. We deserve judgment. But if we recognize the death and resurrection of Jesus, the faithfulness of the promise of God for us then we see that we are indeed forgiven. When Romans 3:23 declares that we're all sinners, it also declares that we are justified by his grace, that everyone in Christ is made righteous. I talked about this justification and righteousness being the same idea. When we talk about being justified by grace through faith, we are talking about being made righteous through the work of Christ. Then I talked about the front side and the back side of that righteousness on Reformation Sunday. The negative viewpoint is God declares us to be not guilty, but the positive viewpoint is God declares us to be righteous.

Here again, is the gospel truth for you. In Jesus, you are forgiven. You've heard that over and over again in your journey with Christ. Amen? But also hear this truth. In Jesus, you are declared and made righteous by the work of Jesus for you. Believe it and allow it to be an anchor that provides hope for you regardless of the circumstances of your life. Allow it to provide a hope for you that gives you the courage to enter into the very presence of God, to abide with him. Remember that the forgiveness that God gives to us is a forgiveness that is

intended to allow us to be in Christ, to be with God. To come with confidence in our prayers, not worry, not concern, but knowing that God's orientation toward us is that he loves us, that we are his children, that he is looking forward to being with us.

We're going to have eleven people in our house during the week of Thanksgiving. Both our son and daughter and their entire families are coming. We can't wait because Dad - and Mom - want to be with them. And I'm only an earthly father who is aware that our house is going to be utter chaos, with those five little grandchildren running around and stirring each other up and probably fighting over time. I know that there will be challenges to those five days and *I can't wait*. Your heavenly father rejoices in your presence, rejoices in your coming to him. Allow the hope that is an anchor for your soul to make you firm and secure, knowing that you are invited to come into the very presence of God.

In Hebrews, after it talks about this place that we have with God because of his faithfulness, because of what he has done, it then goes on in the eleventh chapter to go through this hall of fame of the people of faith. Through the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, it goes on and on, by faith, by faith, by faith. By faith, Enoch. By faith, Abraham. By faith, Abel. It's a reminder to us that the journey of life lived out by those Old Testament people of faith was a living out of their faith. That's what we're called to do as well. "Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses," chapter twelve of Hebrews begins, "let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."⁴

What I just did is I looked at these two verses in Hebrews 10 that are part of our reading today and I recognized that the first verse was rooted deeply in the fullness of the chapters that went before it and the last verse that we focused on was rooted deeply in what followed, by showing evidence that in fact, God's people had, by claiming that hope that they have in Christ, to live out their faith in their lives, not as obligation, not as duty, not in order to merit God's love, but in response to the hope that they have.

Next week is Stewardship Sunday. We're calling it Thank Offering Sunday because that's what stewardship is. Stewardship is a response to how we, in gratitude, live out the blessings

⁴ Hebrews 12:1

that God has poured into our lives. Yes, it is about money, but it is not only about money. It's also about how you can use your gifts to serve Christ, to stir up others to love and good works. How you can commit yourself to regularly entering into the promise of God that was assured for you in the forgiveness that you received in Christ. It's about thinking about how are we going to live out our lives. The grace that God gives forgives us from our sin, but it also frees us for a life of purpose, gratitude, and thanksgiving.

It's a question not only of how you live, but of how you live influences the other people in your life. I'm remembering the service for your husband and the testimony of how many lives were touched by the witness of his life. I'm looking over here and seeing how you love on your kids and demonstrate for them the faithfulness to them so that they might be influenced by you as their parents. I'm enjoying you guys being on the wrong side and in the front row today because it says something about your influence. Brothers and sisters in Christ, God forgives us and blesses us both to set us free from sin and allow us to enter into the very presence of God, but also then to live our lives as lives of influence, as lives of witness. This verse calls us to think deeply about how we influence others.

The word here in NIV is "stir up" but here's the interesting thing. The actual work in Greek is, honestly, more accurately translated as "provoke." Now provoke is an antagonistic word, isn't it? Don't worry about being too gentle. Figure out how you can stir others up to love and good works. How you can motivate and encourage and empower them to begin to live in the fullness of life that God intends to them as they live out this hope that is theirs in Jesus by the faithfulness of God. Is the spirit stirring in you at all? Bringing to your mind or your heart a person or a group of people that you might stir up you? Might provoke?

As we think about the discipleship of Saint Timothy's, as you think about this stewardship card that you'll be filling out in the coming week, this is my bias. One of the strongest elements of discipleship is being able to discern what gifts God has given me in order that I might use those gifts for the common good. As I have been involved in Lutheran congregations for, I don't even know how long. I guess my whole life. It's been a long time; I know not that long, but it's been a long time - I'm old now. One of the things I recognize is that so many of God's saints in our Lutheran congregations, if you ask them what gift has God given

you, what is the gift of the Holy Spirit at work in you say they have no idea. And yet the bible promises. It tells us in 1st Corinthians 12:7 that each person is given “the manifestation of the Spirit” in their lives “for the common good.” You have gifts, but since you don't see them, we turn to this verse. We, here at Saint Timothy's this year, in particular, turn to this verse and I say to all of you consider how you can stir up others to love and good works by helping them to see the gifts in themselves that you see in them. Encourage one another by letting each other know the gifts you see in each other, by speaking those, and by coming alongside and praying with one another about how those gifts might be used. I believe all so sudden we're going to be stirred up in amazing ways, to accomplish by faith what God is calling us to be and do here at Saint Timothy's in this community of faith. By using, encouraging, and affirming the times, talents, and treasures of one another, we will begin to see the kingdom of God unfold in the lives of his people.

But... If you listen carefully, you heard in all of the lessons for today that this doesn't come with ease. It doesn't come without challenge. It doesn't come without heartache. It doesn't come without brokenness, occasionally expressed between God's people. Sometimes, people are going to annoy you. Sometimes they may even betray you, but we recognize that this hope, this anchor for our own souls, for our own lives is rooted in the faithfulness of God and not in the circumstances of our lives or the faithfulness of his people, so we stand firm in the hope that is ours. We continue to live out that hope and live out that righteousness among God's people. We continue to encourage, even if when we provoke them, they don't like it, but we continue to encourage them nonetheless.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we move out of Reformation and All Saints, and as we move towards Thanksgiving Sunday, know that you are forgiven to enter into the presence of God and know that you are gifted to now live your life in the freedom of influence, love, and hope, as you share the love of Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen