

Date: November 17, 2024 (26<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost, Series B)

Title: “Confidence... in Christ”

Text: Hebrews 10:11-25

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup> and since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool. <sup>14</sup> For by one sacrifice He has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

<sup>15</sup> The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First He says:

<sup>16</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put My laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.”

<sup>17</sup> Then He adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

<sup>18</sup> And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a true heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we confess, for He who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

I don’t know if you’ve been following what’s been happening in the financial markets over the last little while, but it’s quite an interesting story. The markets often do very well for a day or two right around the time of a major election, then back off quite a bit.<sup>1</sup> This time, though, the markets kept going up for a full week after the American election. The S&P 500 had its biggest 5-day run of the whole year, and it’s still about 1½ % higher than it was on November 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>2</sup> As one analyst put it, “**Markets like corporate taxes being cut, and markets like deregulation—and those are two staples of the Trump administration policy.**”<sup>3</sup>

Apart from the markets, though, I sense a different sort of wave carrying a lot of people in the opposite direction. A story in last weekend’s “Life Section” (in the *Victoria Times Colonist*) carried the headline, “**How to care for your mental health if you’re struggling with the U.S. election result.**” Now, I know most of us are *not* Americans, and even if we were, this election result would not be the end of the world! But even so, I think it’s fair to say that many people all around the world are not only surprised and confused about what happened in the United States on November 5<sup>th</sup>—they’re also deeply worried about what lies ahead. If the next American president manages to do even half of what he says he’s going to do, the consequences

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<sup>1</sup> Rose Saba (The Canadian Press), “Stocks Rally in Anticipation of U.S. Election Results,” *Victoria Times-Colonist*, Weds Nov 6, B2.

<sup>2</sup> Nov 4 = 5782.76, Nov 14 = 5870.62 (<https://ca.investing.com/indices/us-spx-500-historical-data>), accessed Nov 16, 2024

<sup>3</sup> Macan Nia, in Rose Saba (The Canadian Press), “Technology sector helps lift TSX, U.S. markets mixed,” *Victoria Times-Colonist*, Thurs Nov 14, B2.

for all of us, everywhere, are truly going to be significant.

If you were listening carefully to today's Gospel reading, you might have felt the same kind of thing. Jesus too was looking ahead, there in Mark 13, and giving his disciples a pretty clear and direct heads-up about what they ought to expect in the future.

Actually, it was a two-part conversation. The first part centred around the Temple there in Jerusalem, which the disciples were totally impressed with. (v.1) **“Look, Teacher!,”** one of them said to Jesus; **“What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!”** (1) **“Do you see all these great buildings?”** Jesus asked them; **“Not one stone here will be left on another; every single one of them is going to be thrown down.”** (2) Already, after hearing just that much, those disciples were pretty rattled. As soon as they left the Temple and went back to one of their usual hang-outs (**“on the Mount of Olives”**), Peter, James, and John came to Jesus **“privately”** and asked him, **“When will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”** (4) Those disciples weren't thinking about whether or not the destruction of the Temple would be “good for business”: they understood it would be a catastrophe that would destroy the whole society they had grown up in. Without the Temple, where would they be able to meet with God to pay him all the sacrifices they owed him on account of their sins? Where would the “centre” of their civilization be, not only for themselves but also for the millions of other Jews who lived out there beyond the borders of Israel, and came back to Jerusalem whenever they could, and looked to the Temple-leaders to provide them with guidance and support and direction for daily living?

In all those ways, you see, the Temple was more than just a building. It was the very centre of Jewish life—and *had* been for centuries! This was no small thing, that Jesus was now, all of a sudden, looking ahead and anticipating the total destruction of the Temple. What *exactly* did he think was going to happen, anyway? And along with that: Was there *anything* those disciples on their part could do to *prepare* for that catastrophe?

Well: As we heard, Jesus responded to those questions by broadening the frame and speaking more generally *not only* about the destruction of that Temple there in Jerusalem, but also about the End of the world as a whole. In fact, Jesus has so much to say about the end of the world (here in Mark 13) that we're only hearing *part* of his description here today. (We'll hear *another* part again next week.) Neither this week nor next week do we hear anything about how those original disciples *responded* to these prophecies. But based on the grim forecast that Jesus shares with them, I think they would have been even more anxious, and worried, and upset, than they had been after hearing that first little bit of his prophecy about what was going to happen to the Temple. What Jesus has to say about the end of *the world* is deeply unsettling and challenging to us all.

For here's the thing. All those *other* things we worry about “out there in the world”—they're *only* “things out there in the world.” We can be pretty confident that the sun is still going to rise on January 21<sup>st</sup>, the day after Donald Trump returns to the White House. That will not be true the day after Jesus returns to earth “to judge both the living and the dead.” That'll be “it”—not just the end for the Temple in Jerusalem... but the very... final... end... of history itself. And *that* is something no human being, no religious system, and no society has ever faced before: *that* Day when **“[Jesus], the Son of Man, comes in the clouds with power and great glory, and sends out his angels to gather his Elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”** (26-27) It's true, that all of those *signs* Jesus points to (when he answers his disciples' questions about *when* this is going to happen)—all those *signs* are things we *have* seen before, and are *unfortunately* already rather well-acquainted with:

**“false prophets... wars, and rumours of wars...  
nation rising against nation, and kingdom against kingdom...  
earthquakes, and famines... persecutions... betrayals... and rebellions.”** (6-13)

But all of that, Jesus says, is just a warm-up: “**Such things must happen, but the End [itself] is still to come!**” (7) To paraphrase an old song by Bachman-Turner-Overdrive, “*B-b-b-baby, you ain’t seen nothin’ yet!*”

Which brings us, thankfully, to today’s second reading. It’s not quite a Monty Python-style “**And now for something completely different!**”—but this reading from Hebrews chapter 10 does give us a *healthy, calm, and reassuring* plan for how you and I can *prepare* for the End that we know is coming. The writer is totally matter-of-fact about the *coming* of that End: “**When Jesus [our great high] priest had offered, for all time, one sacrifice for sins,**” we hear (that is, by dying and rising in our place)—“**He sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time He waits for his enemies to be made his footstool.**” (Heb 10:12-13) Now: obviously, that’s a very different way of describing the End than the way Jesus himself described it in today’s Gospel reading. But the event is exactly the same. “No more Mr. Nice-Guy” when *the Lord* comes back again! He will completely destroy sin, death, and the devil—and all of their minions—once and for all!

Notice though how *confident* this writer to the Hebrews urges us to be, as we *wait* for that day to arrive. These “calm, cool, and collected” words here in Hebrews chapter 10 are exactly what you and I need, to help us face *all* the anxieties that life in this scarred and sin-damaged world stirs up within us.

Jesus, you see, has already done everything that needed to be done, to get us ready to stand, with confidence, in the day of God’s judgement. “**By one sacrifice,**” we heard near the start of this reading, “**This priest [Jesus] has [already] made perfect forever, those who are sanctified.**” (14) Never mind politicians who threaten to disrupt everything for everyone! Our Saviour Jesus Christ settles us down and gives us peace. I love the way this writer remembers—and reminds *us* of—God’s strong promise through the prophet Jeremiah: “**Their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more!**” (v.17 // Jer 31:34) Because Jesus has died and risen to *bring us* “**forgiveness [for all such things], no further sacrifice for sin is necessary!**” (18)

That, in fact, is *why* Jesus anticipated (back in our Gospel reading in Mark 13), that the Temple there in Jerusalem would all come tumbling down. The sacrifices that that Temple centred around, were not going to be needed at all anymore, after he made his own, one-time sacrifice for the sins of all humanity, on the cross!

“**And so,**” this writer continues—“**therefore!**”—*because* Jesus has forgiven our sins, and *taken away* any fear we might once have had, of God’s “retribution”—you and I now “**have confidence to enter [even] that Most Holy Place [where God himself dwells], by the blood of Jesus.**” (19) Isn’t that astonishing? So many people are so worried, right now, about the prospect of a 4-year reign of a mere human being. I don’t want to minimize that fear, or pretend it’s not well-grounded! But I do want to help us think about that fear in relative terms, compared to this far-deeper and much-more-serious fear that all of us human beings *naturally* have, when we contemplate entering the very presence of God himself. “*Forget that fear!*” this writer tells us—and don’t forget, these words were written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. “**We have confidence,**” this holy writer says, “**even to enter the Most Holy Place in the entire universe, by the blood of Jesus.**”

*And so* (this writer again goes on to encourage us), “**Let us draw near to God with a true heart, and with the full assurance faith brings.**” (22) Can you *imagine* “drawing near” to some politician who you are deeply afraid of? I have no appetite for that at all. I don’t even want to see such people on TV, or hear their voices; it’s hard enough just to read about them in print, with that much of a buffer between them and me. By contrast, notice how *consistently* this writer encourages *us* to be “**confident,**” as we think about what lies ahead for us all, at the End. You and I can “**draw near to God**”—not just hoping for the best, or pretending everything’s fine, but actually having “**a true heart, and the full assurance faith brings.**” (22) Because our hearts

have been “*sprinkled (to cleanse us from a guilty conscience),*” and because our bodies have been “*washed (with the purifying water of Holy Baptism),*” there is no reason at all for us to “hold back” in worry or fear or anxiety about what lies ahead. Instead, we can “**hold fast, unswervingly, to the faith we confess!**” (23)

For that’s the *really* great and glorious thing, that gives all of us Christians our very greatest confidence. “**He who promised is faithful.**” (23) Politicians?—oh my goodness, so many of them just say one thing and do another, *breaking* our trust! But God *never* lets us down. He has always had *the same* plan for how to fix everything that’s wrong in this world, and he has never deviated “one inch” from carrying out that plan. It’s because of *his* faithfulness, that *we* have faith—meaning that we can *rely on* him, and *trust* him with our very lives. He will never turn on us... fail us... let us down... or say one thing, and do the total opposite. That, in fact, is one of the *most common* things the whole New Testament *assures us* of, time and time again:

“**He who promised is faithful**” (we hear this twice, here in Hebrews);

“**The one who called you is faithful**” (that’s in 1 Thessalonians);

“**The Lord is faithful**” (2 Thessalonians);

“**Christ is faithful**” (2 Timothy, and Revelation);

“**God is faithful**” (we hear that 3 times in the letters to the Corinthians, and once in 1 John).

It’s the character of a person that really matters (right?), when we’re trying to decide how to *think* about them, and how to *relate* to them. A person’s character tells us who they *really are*. And there’s no question that *we* can be confident in the *character* of the God we trust—even as we face all the tests and trials the future is sure to bring.

- He is faithful: meaning, he will not let us down!
- He is faithful: meaning, we can count on him!
- He is faithful: meaning, we can take him at his word, and rely on the forgiveness and mercy that he showers us with, already here and now, through Jesus!
- He is faithful: meaning, he will be *with* us, and *for* us, forever.

So, “**let us encourage one another,**” this reading ends—“**and all the more so, as you see the Day (of the Lord’s return) approaching!**” (25)

- Yes, for sure, let us encourage one another “**toward love and good deeds,**” as this writer puts it—
- and toward “**meeting together**” too, here in worship. (24-25)
- But most of all, let us encourage one another “**to hold unswervingly to the hope we confess.**” (23)

For that hope is anchored, today as in every generation, in the confidence that “**He who promised is faithful.**” (23) *God*, our heavenly Father, will never let us down.

Thanks be to God! AMEN!