

"A Confident Faith"

Pastor Larry Lineberger

Heb.10: 19-21

Lent - 2/17/16 @ Hope Lutheran Church

Our text speaks of entering the Holy Place with confidence. I think we would all agree that living with confidence is better than living with fear and anxiety. We admire people who exude a positive, confident spirit. But there is another side to this.

I'm reminded of the old **story of the famous brain surgeon** who happened to see a young boy lose control of his bicycle and run headlong into a tree. He immediately understood that this was a serious injury, asked a bystander to call for an ambulance, and began to minister to the injured boy. A small concerned crowd soon gathered. Then another boy rushed up, pushing people aside, and said to the doctor, *"I'll take over now. I'm a Boy Scout and I just got my merit badge for First Aid."*

Clearly, confidence must have a firm foundation. False confidence is worse than no confidence. Does your faith have a firm foundation? Is your faith filled with unshakeable confidence? Or does it tremble in the face of difficulty and challenge and loss? Do you trust God and his promises? Every time? All the time? Or are there doubts, loss of confidence?

Our text was written to Hebrew Christians, Jewish people, and the author made assumptions about their background, their knowledge. When he speaks of *entering the Holy Place* they knew exactly what he was talking about. I'm going to assume that some of you don't know everything he was talking about. If you are knowledgeable, a little review won't hurt.

Picture in your mind a tent in the shape of a rectangle (45 x 15) divided into two rooms...two thirds on one side and one third on the other. Imagine a heavy woven curtain dividing the two rooms. . **This was the tabernacle**, the mobile, portable, traveling church that accompanied the Israelite people in their wilderness wanderings for 40 years. There are detailed instructions and descriptions in Exodus 25 & 26.

Outside the tabernacle was a laver, a bowl for ceremonial washing and a bronze altar for sacrificing animals. Inside the larger room were three pieces of furniture...a lampstand, (light of the world?) a table with bread (Holy Communion?) and incense altar. Behind the heavy woven curtain, in the smaller room, was the Ark of the Covenant (manna and Aaron's rod). This was the residence of God himself.

It was called the Holy of Holies. No one, NO ONE, entered that place except the designated High Priest, and that only one time a year on the Day of Atonement. You can bet he trembled the whole time and left as quickly as possible after performing his sacred duties. To come this close to the presence of God was a frightening, scary thing.

So when **our text speaks of entering the Holy Place with confidence we have to understand that this was a remarkable thing.** This was a game changer. This required a totally different perception of the nature of God. We are suddenly now speaking of an approachable God...not set apart behind a curtain...a God in whose presence one can be comfortable and confident.

There **is another biblical passage** that more or less completes the image we must have in our minds in order to understand this text. . In the account of the crucifixion of Jesus in Luke 23 there is a little detail that is often overlooked. Jesus is on the cross and we read in v. 44, *"It was now about the sixth hour (12 noon) and darkness came over the whole land until the 9th hour (3 PM) for the sun stopped shining. And **the curtain of the temple was torn in two.** Jesus called out with a loud voice, " Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. When he had said this, he breathed his last."*

The curtain of the temple was torn in two! You see, when they stopped using the tabernacle, the portable church used in the wilderness, and built the temple in Jerusalem, they replicated the rooms...the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies...with the curtain between. **And at the moment Jesus died that curtain was miraculously ripped in two...the strongest possible symbol of transition from the Old Covenant to the New.** The death of Jesus was the game changer! No basis any longer for thinking about a fearsome, wrathful God in whose presence one trembles. Jesus death and ultimate resurrection provides every reason for us to approach our God with confidence! What kept us from the presence of God? What made being in the presence of God a frightful thing? Our sin! Our guilt and shame. The threat of judgment and wrath. But in Christ our sin is forgiven. We have been clothed with Christ's righteousness, robed in white, in our Baptismal garments, we can enter the Holy of Holies. We can trust him and rejoice in his presence.

Now we can read the text with same understanding as those early Hebrew Christians. *"Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus , by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a Great Priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. "*

This is **the promise and the invitation**. The Old Testament believer required repeated sacrifices, without any assurance that the animals were pure enough, perfect enough, and the High Priest entered the Most Holy Place with fear and trembling, never fully confident in the adequacy of the sacrifices... And now we have a Great High Priest, who was Himself the perfect sacrifice, who died once for all, that we might live in full assurance of faith.

This is **the promise and invitation, but it is also the challenge, isn't it?** We may know all this intellectually. We know that Jesus died on a cross to make payment for my sins. We know that Jesus is the Great High Priest who is the bridge-builder between ourselves and God. **But does it make a difference in the way we live? What is the confidence level of our faith?**

Take, for example, **your prayer life**. If we have free access to the Father's ear, if we can approach him with the confidence of a little child who knows that his Daddy will never turn him away, would we not come often, repeatedly, and with full trust that He will respond in the way that is best for us? If we know that the Creator of the universe knows the very hairs of our heads, would we not entrust to him all the cares and concerns of our lives. It's hard to imagine a truly confident faith not taking full advantage of the opportunity to have an intimate, personal daily relationship with our heavenly Father. What hinders our prayers? Why do we find it so difficult to set apart time for prayer? It is a privilege... not an obligation. An active prayer life is a sign of a confident faith.

Think about **your stewardship life**...your commitment of time and treasure to the Lord's work here on earth. The widow who caught the Lord's attention when she placed in the temple treasury all she had was revealing a confident faith! It wasn't so much that the treasury needed her copper pennies, she needed to give generously to reflect her love and gratitude and she had confidence that God's care would sustain her. Every time you write the offering check that is larger than usual, larger than comfortable, you are making a statement about the confidence level of your faith. The confident faith finds joy in giving.

Think for a moment about walking through the **valley of the shadow of death**. Your death, "*dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return*" the death of your loved ones. It is the confident faith that can truly say with the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil." His rod and staff will protect us. He will fill our cup with oil and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Words that be spoken only with a confident faith.

Think for a moment about the **burden of conscience**. Is there a secret sin that continues to weigh heavy on your soul? You hear the word of absolution; all your sins

are forgiven. But it seems more a theory than a reality. Your mind tells you that God forgives, but that seems of little value if you cannot forgive yourself, if you cannot get it out of your mind, if you cannot release the burden and live free. It is the confident faith that experiences the blessed assurance of full pardon and peace that passes understanding.

To paraphrase Pastor Wagner's constant encouragement, you can't see the curtain in the temple torn, the fear removed from the Holy Place, you can't see the cross of Jesus opening the door to heaven and continue to live the same old, same old way. To have faith is to have confidence. And our faith is built on the solid rock of the crucified and risen Christ. It is not a false confidence. It is a sure foundation.

It is my prayer that our Lenten journey, our walking with Jesus on the way to Mt. Calvary will nourish and enrich our faith so that we can put aside our doubts and fears and live with confidence, trusting in God's mercy, living and proclaiming the Word and love of Christ. Amen.