

February 21, 2016

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church
Hebrews 10:21

THEREFORE Sermon Series: "How Near, God?"

A letter to God. A letter from a Christian, from a person who is, perhaps, very much like yourself.

Dear God,

I have struggled to know how to say this to you. No offense, but you're not always the easiest person for me to talk to. That whole omnipotence and omniscience deal of yours can be pretty intimidating, you know! And, yes, I understand, talking to you is supposed to be a natural, easy thing for a Christian. But, sometimes, for me, the prayer words just don't come out. I'm not quite sure how to say to you what I've been feeling lately. So I thought I'd try writing it down in a letter.

I've been feeling a distance between us, Lord. I don't feel very close to you lately. I've known you all my life. Since I was a little child, I've heard about you, learned about you, read about you. I believe in you. But, as I said, I just don't feel very close to you these days.

For a while, I'll admit, I was blaming you for the distance between us. I've been through some rough patches in my life recently, and I started wondering, "Does God really care about what's going on? Is he paying attention? How come he isn't helping me out more?"

I wondered if you had rejected me, God. I thought maybe your love – at least, your love for me -- had run dry.

But, deep down, I knew. It was me who was putting the

distance between us. It was me who was straying, wandering, and chasing after pursuits and pleasures that were definitely out of bounds. You never left me, God. I left you. And, even today, my temptations to sin, my sinful actions and thoughts, and even my inborn sinful human nature all conspire to tug me and pull me away from you. Sin always creates the distance between us, doesn't it?

So let me start by saying I'm sorry for all of that. Truly, truly sorry.

Here's my real question, though. How near to you am I supposed to be? I see people at church who seem so devoted to you. They're way more faithful than me. And I can tell that they are enjoying a close, intimate relationship with you. I don't feel so close. I said it before. There's a distance between us.

How near to you am I supposed to be?

To tell the truth, I get a little freaked out at the thought of being extremely close to you. Maybe I keep you at arm's length for a reason. If you are super-near, you're probably going to disrupt my life in certain ways. You're going to want to shake me out of my comfort zone. Maybe I don't want you to rub off too much on me!

But that's my sinful self talking again, isn't it? That's my sin-filled human nature messing with me, and leading me away from you again.

When I'm really honest with myself, I know how much I need you in my life. I know how much better my life is when I'm in tune with you, when I am walking the walk and following the way of Jesus.

I get suckered into thinking, every once in a while, that the ways of the world are superior. But they're not. Your ways are so much better for me. Your will, your Word, your love, your grace are what I really need most in my life. You bring a peace to my soul that the world can never give me. You give me joy and purpose like nothing else can. I need more of that in my life, God. I need to be close to you. Nearer to you.

So tell me, God. How do I draw near to you?

Signed,

Distant Christian

A letter from God. Not an actual letter from God. But it's based on a real letter from God (Bible), and I think that this letter is true to what God would say to a person just like you.

Dear Distant Christian,

Nice letter! You should do that more often. I like hearing from you. I love hearing from you.

I understand how you feel. I know it's not easy for you, and I see how you struggle. And you're right. Sin always separates.

But you're not as far, far away as you might think or feel. You're not perfect. We both know that. But you're forgiven. And you forget that. Or, at the very least, you don't always fully appreciate that.

My Son died on the cross for you. I sent my perfect, holy Son to be the sacrifice for your imperfect, ugly sin. Jesus paid for your sins – all of your sins – once and for all. He tore open the curtain of separation, the veil of division between

us. You're forgiven. I forgive you. That means your sins are gone. They are removed. They are remembered no more; and they separate us – you and me – no more.

“Therefore,” I once wrote – actually, I inspired a friend of mine to write – “therefore.” That is such an important word for you, my friend. “Therefore.” That word reminds you that Jesus didn't die for nothing. You're not forgiven, in a meaningless way. The Son of God bleeding and dying on a cross has profound, personal, powerful implications for your life.

Here's one of them. “Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith ...” (Hebrews 10:21). Draw near! You want to know how near you're supposed to be with me? Do you really need to ask?

I made you. I created you. I showered you with love. I watched as you rebelled in your sin. But then I redeemed you. I saved you. I forgave you, and gave you new life, through my Son, Jesus.

I want to be near to you every day, every moment, for all eternity. You are my child, and I love you with all my heart.

So, please, “Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” I wrote that, and I mean that. It means you don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be the smartest Christian, or have the strongest faith in the church. It means you don't have to have all the answers, or be able to prove everything you believe. Just have faith. Trust in Jesus. He died on the cross for you. Therefore, “Draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Faith in Jesus. Faith in my Son. Faith in my love for you.

Love,

God

