

How good is your memory?

On October 3rd, I shared with you that the Second Reading has shifted from James to Hebrews and that we would be resting in the book of Hebrews for seven weeks. Well, here we are, we are week seven. Our last Hebrews reading.

I have not lived into Hebrews as much as I thought that I would be when I began to look at this seven-week cycle back in late September. However, today, I want to play some Hebrews catch up and stay in the second reading for the sermon today. I think that it is very practical for us in the twenty-first century and in particular can be very beneficial for us here at Bay View.

Our passage starts off by sharing with us how the Leviticus system worked. It may NOT seem like an important matter BUT in fact, it plays a crucial role when we see and hear the depiction of Jesus as a high priest.

The priest would stand at the altar and they would make **daily** offerings. With Christ, the offering is effective and can be offered just once. This is how our passage starts off, in verse fourteen, it states that the offering of Jesus was once-for-all.

In our lectionary, we had the opportunity to include verses fifteen-eighteen or simply skip to nineteen. The reason is that they really want us to focus in on nineteen through twenty-five. These seven verses are critical for our life together.

This section of scriptures is one of two major transitions in the book. These seven verses summarize the book, what we have heard the last weeks and then introduces us to how the book is going to conclude.

In these seven verses we see the preacher pleading for the community to do the following three things:

- Approach God with a true heart
- Hold fast to the confession of our hope
- Consider how to provoke one another to love and to do good deeds

This morning, I want to dive into those a little more and hopefully give you some encouragement but at the same time challenge you at a deeper level.

In the first century, the Christian community was experiencing a new reality. They were able to come to God directly. Thus, we see the encouragement to come to God with a true heart.

Then we see that we are to hold fast to the confession.

Since we are speaking of confession. Let me share a confession with you. I did not grow up in a faith community that used confession and assurance. Confession was more of something that you did individually in your personal prayer and devotional time **NOT** as a church community.

When I first came into the ELCA and saw confession and assurance, I was actually weirded out. However, as I have mentioned in the past, I have now come to love our confessional time and I truly appreciate searching through various liturgies that I believe will connect our confession and assurance to the theme of the week.

In Hebrews the preacher shares that the confession is a corporate confession, not an individual confession and I missed that as a child and a young adult.

Each week, we come together to confess. Sometimes, individuals may wonder why do we have to do it every week. I mean, we don't have to continually come back, do we? I think one of the reasons is that we do it to express our gratitude. We are giving God thanks. The other reason is the confession and assurance are about storytelling. It is sharing the story of God's love and mercy. The love and mercy that they have for us.

We come to God acknowledging genuinely that we have sinned and offer an apology. Then, we can hear the words. Siblings in Christ, your sins are forgiven.

Then the last exhortation focuses on how we as a community can provoke one another to love and do good deeds.

Before, I jumped into that, I want to circle back to the three exhortations in their entirety. When I look at the landscape of Christianity and the church landscape in the United States, I agree with Madison Pierce when she states that the church has changed. It has become a place where **I** learn, where **I** worship, and where **I** go to get my own personal growth.

The picture in Hebrews is vastly different. It is more communal. It is about service. It is about gathering together for the sake of others.

So, let's jump back into verse twenty-five. Let us hear it once again, this time from Eugene Peterson and then see how it can be used as a challenge for us here at Bay View.

Eugene says, "Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on."

In confirmation class, we are doing a three-week series on authority. It has been a challenging series in many ways. I bring that to you because this verse is said in an authoritative manner. They are sending a clear message: "**do not neglect to meet together.**" As Amy Peeler says, this preacher will not give allowance for the Bedside Baptist as the joke goes. She then takes it a step further by saying that the Hebrews preacher is also saying, there is no mentality for individuals to use the line, "I love Jesus but can live without the church."

Going solo would be less complicated but the author of Hebrews shares the importance of Christian fellowship. We, as a church, must remain together and pay attention to one another. We do this, so once again, we can encourage one another towards love and good deeds.

We at Bay View have many opportunities over the next few weeks to encourage one another to do good deeds. Let me briefly highlight them and encourage you to participate in these activities.

The first opportunity ties into our stewardship campaign. The campaign is two-fold. The first aspect is to give a stretch gift this week or next. The stretch gift will help ensure that we, as a church, will end up in the black for the 2021 calendar year **without** moving any money into the general accounts. That is a huge celebration. The second component is to get your pledge cards in, thus, we as a church can better plan and prepare for the 2022 year.

Then, you may have seen the Christmas tree as you came into the church today. It is our Giving Tree. We have the opportunity to bless forty-four children this year. I encourage you to grab a tag and go out and shop for the child that you picked.

We then want to offer you the opportunity to participate in the cookie walk. There are many ways for you to connect with this event. We look forward to celebrating a successful event on December 4th.

The writer of Hebrews truly exhorts us to go out and make every endeavor to live out our faith to the fullest. Nathan Nettleton states that he believes that the preacher is trying to push the community to come up with more and more creative ways to do this. Thus, I want to send you out on a brainstorming session. Think of creative ways that we as a community can live our lives out more and then remember that the good news of Christ can be shared more deeply when our life of love is shown in our actions to one another.

I normally do not do this. But, I am going to have a P.S. to my sermon. Each week, I have a lot of material or thoughts that are cut and do not make it in the sermon. That was the case, once again today. However, I want to share a paragraph that I felt that was very meaningful. It comes from Melissa Snarr. Hear the P.S.

Instead of undertaking a radical individualized journey, we move toward the promise of God with mutual encouragement and even provocation towards love and good deeds. The church is not a polite gathering, a lifestyle enclave or even a liturgical affinity group. Believers require a community of holy honesty, sacred risk and audacious love.

I think that there are many individuals outside the walls of the church that would love to join Bay View if we lived that out.

Amen.