**Hebrews 10:11-25**

11And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” 13and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” 14For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. 15And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, 16“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,” 17he also adds, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” 18Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

19Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Message –

One of the key observations of the book of Hebrews is the comparison between the temple with the role of the priest offering sacrifices and the work of Christ who acted as the once and for all time sacrifice for sin. The priest had to offer sacrifices every day and even then they were inadequate, but Christ – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - was the one sin-free sacrifice. Through his offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. Christ has freed us from the law, by the Holy Spirit placing the law of Christ in our hearts and our minds. He has promised that having been perfected, having been forgiven, our sins and lawless deeds will not be remembered or bought up again. .

Through His death, Christ is now seated in the place of victory, at the right hand of God. Are all his enemies finally silenced – no, he is waiting until all his enemies are made into a footstool for his feet.

Likewise, do we see ourselves to be perfected? Absolutely not, we are very much still works in progress, being shaped and fashioned by the master-crafter. The question is, how do we see ourselves. Do we focus on our faults and how far we have to go or do we focus on what Christ has done and what he says about us: perfected, sanctified, forgiven?

How we see ourselves and interpret the good and the bad that we do really affects how we live and especially how we relate to God.

The three lettuces in this passage have been worked and re-worked by many preachers through the years. Let’s look at them – it might be for the first time or it might be for the hundredth. Let’s be open to hear God’s voice speak to us as we consider them.

Firstly, let us approach.

In temple terms we can come confidently into the inner sanctuary. There was a thick curtain, some think 30 centimetres thick, between the court where the priests operated and the people worshipped and the inner sanctuary. When Jesus died, this curtain is said to have been torn in two from the top to the bottom. The barrier between us and God had been broken. We have access to the very presence of God through the Holy Spirit. We can approach God without fear. God will not bring up our past. God will not hold our sins against us. Through Christ we have free access. Of course we all have things to confess and faults to be honest about, but we are not to cringe back from our relationship with God because of them, instead we are to approach, come forward as we are and there we encounter pure love. Love strong enough to receive our worst and also strong enough to set us free from what binds us and keeps us from being all he made us to be.

I have used this before but its worth repeating – often.

Read casting Shadows pg 53 in Colliding with God by Richard Skinner based on the theology of Julian of Norwich (14-15th century)

So, without fear, or condemnation we can freely engage in a loving relationship with God through the death of Christ.

Secondly, let us hold fast to the confession of our faith. Many things went on in the early church a generation or more after Jesus death and resurrection. While many people were coming to Christ in Faith, also there were trials. People were discouraged that Christ had not returned as they hoped for. There was infighting in the church. Some, doubted their faith. Persecution, if not current was always a possibility. In chapter 12 of Hebrews the writer comments that they had not endured to the point of shedding blood, but obviously they knew the possibility of violence against them. The plea to faithfulness culminates in chapter 11, with the extensive chapter on faith listing heroes of faith from people in Jewish history, many of whom met a gruesome death.

Faith in Christ has its challenges today. As an example, the proclamation tied up in our membership that we profess - Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord might be challenging. In the light of the new world we live in post the terrorist attacks in Christchurch a little over a month ago, with many interfaith services and a humanitarian show of unity against terrorism, should Christians stick with an exclusive kind of faith? Shouldn’t we join in taking a higher position as sung by John Lennon?

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky

Imagine all the people
Living for today (ah ah ah)

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

In the light of backlash against religion per se, a world of no religion seems desirable. So, it would be easy to walk from the faith we profess.

Maybe, our faith has some growing to do, so that we can be ‘sure of what we hope for’ and confident to express it, but with gentleness and respect.

That is only one example, but a very up-to date one. Others might have had sincere and persistent prayers go un-answered, others might have had tragedy too large to cope with or questions too big; maybe Christians have been too unloving, maybe God has been too distant?

The call here is to hold fast to – cling to – the confession of our faith. In the temptation to slip from it, we are instead to cling to it.

Thirdly, let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good deeds. The church is a strange beast, especially in the west. We proclaim faith in Christ as an individual choice and we believe in Jesu as our personal saviour, then we come together and we are to behave as a body, all connected, all in unity together. Western individualism with all its benefits in terms of confidence and self-esteem, finds a hard home in the church. Unity in diversity is a lovely phrase, but it is so hard to maintain. Really we want a unity based on people being like us. Let us – together see how we can spur one another along in loving. Jesus said: they will know you are my disciples by the way you love one another.

Christians have a particular kind of love to offer the world based ion the death of Christ. A love which is forgiving. A love which never ends. A love which responds to evil with good. A love which gives, but does not require anything in return.

We are not to give up on meeting together because it is in this place week by week where we are called to remember who’s we are: we belong to Christ. And to remember what we are called to: love in the image of Christ.

So, God declares that we have been forgiven and freed from sin because of the death of Jesus so that we can display his love through the combined action of the church.

For us today, where does the challenge lie?

In believing we can confidently approach God without fear?

In holding to the faith you profess through a changing world?

In living a life of love based from gathering together as God’s people?