

Since We Have Confidence
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
November 15, 2015

Hebrews 10:11-25

¹¹ And 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’, ¹³ and 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.

¹⁹ Therefore, 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.

Professor and author Tom Long, in talking about verses 12 and 13 of our reading said this, “Jesus has finished his work. He has destroyed sin and death, and now, as Lord, he is seated in authority at the right hand of God. But the full effect of Christ’s work has not yet been accomplished. God is now at work in the world subduing the ‘enemies’ of Christ, and Christ is watching and waiting for this process to be completed (v. 13). In other words, the world today is something like Europe after the D-day invasion. The victory is sure, but there are still battles to be fought. Christ has already defeated evil, but only at the end of time...will this triumph be clear and complete.”¹ The victory is sure, but there are still battles to be fought. Lord, have mercy on this world as we wait to see that victory, for all we can see are the battles. White students standing in circles chanting “White Power” as a response to efforts to address systemic racism at the University of Missouri. A suicide bombing at a funeral of a person who was on the “wrong” side of the ISIL², resulting in at least twenty-one people dead.³ Twin suicide bombings in Beirut killing at least 43 people and wounding hundreds, with credit being taken by the

¹ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, pp. 305/7.

² Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

³ <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/11/13/suicide-bomber-kills-at-least-21-in-baghdad.html>

Islamic State, against people who are against them.⁴ Coordinated attacks in Paris killing at least 127 and injuring hundreds, with credit being taken again by the Islamic State.⁵ One hundred and forty-seven people killed and at least 70 injured at a university in Kenya by Islamic militants.⁶ People believing that being Islamic makes one a terrorist, which is as patently untrue as thinking all white males are school shooters, theater shooters, public space shooters. And these battles we name are from this week alone, and not a comprehensive list.

The victory is sure. Are we? The recipients of this letter, or combination of letters, known as Hebrews were not sure. The numbers of believers were beginning to decline. Tom Long explains that they were “tired of trying to live the Christian life in a culture that offers no support for it and discouraged about the way evil still seems to persist in the world.”⁷ Oh my. This is not just a letter to an ancient peoples; this is a letter to us. In days like these – while we persist – we feel at the same time “tired of trying to live the Christian life in a culture that offers no support for it and discouraged about the way evil still seems to persist in the world.” Yes, we do. And, in days like these – while we feel tired and discouraged – we persist. Yes, we do.

We hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. I know some days, especially like the ones the world has just seen, we feel hopeless. We cry out, “What can we do?” Or maybe we shrug and say “What can we do.” The confession of hope stands, regardless. The victory is sure, indeed, and the Day **is** approaching but we cannot, we must not, stand around waiting for it to arrive. Truly, God is at work in the world subduing the “enemies” of Christ, that is to say the enemies of love, but we cannot, we must not, stand around waiting for God to be done. More wisdom from the Internet provides this thought: “Sometimes I want to ask God why God allows poverty, famine, and injustice in the world when God could do something about it, but I’m afraid God might just ask me the same question.” God did not place us here as bystanders to God’s work in the world but as God’s workers in the world.

The author of our letter said it this way: “let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Author and theologian Brian McLaren speaks of the work of Christ’s church as secretly plotting for the good of the world.⁸ Secretly plotting for the good of the world. Pastor and TV personality Fred Rogers has been famously quoted as saying, “When I was a boy

⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/fear-grips-beirut-a-day-after-twin-bombings-claimed-by-the-islamic-state/2015/11/13/971ebc32-8981-11e5-bd91-d385b244482f_story.html

⁵ <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-paris-attacks-20151114-story.html>

⁶ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32169080?SThisFB>

⁷ *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 4*, p. 303.

⁸ The idea of “plotting goodness” is credited to Bart Campolo by Brian McLaren.

and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would always say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”^{9, 10} We’ve come together to meet. How are we going to encourage one another? In what ways will we provoke one another to love and good deeds? How are we going to be the helpers? What is our secret plot for the good of the world? What is your secret plot for the good of the world going to be?

Never more true has it been that I hope this “Conversation Starter” is exactly that. I hope it so much so that I am going to ask you to begin the conversation here and now. I’m going to ask you to turn to your neighbors for three minutes and begin imagining together what a secret plot for the good of the world could look like in your life or in the life of this church. This isn’t meant to be a finished product with a strategy outlined by the end of the three minutes but instead something to start you thinking. Let’s start now.

There is a Saturday Night Live skit with Kristen Wiig as a character named Sue who has an over-the-top love for surprises and she is asked to participate in planning a surprise party.¹¹ [image on screen] This is Sue, trying desperately to contain the secret. My hope for us each is that, whatever our secret plot for the good of the world is, we feel like this inside about carrying out our plot. Please keep your conversations going because, now more than ever, we need to be plotting goodness. Now more than ever we need to be like the circle of students at the University of Missouri who stood days after the circles of students chanting “White Power,” and said they would not permit their campus to be an unsafe place for persons of color, and instead sang the Black National Anthem. We join in their prayer, sung in the heart of campus after this run-through.

[video of University of Missouri Singers; Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing]¹²

⁹ <http://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/tragic-events.php>

¹⁰ For a video version of him speaking this, go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-LGHtc_D328

¹¹ Watch the skit here: <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/surprise-party/n12233>

¹² Watch it again at <https://www.facebook.com/161860322540/videos/10153089384807541/>

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