**Welcome**

**Announcements**

* Love Thy Neighbor
* Seating in Sanctuary
* Wear masks
* Maintain Social Distancing
* Overflow room available
* Only one service at 11:00 until further notice
* Church Center App
* We need your email address
* Lord’s Supper served next Sunday
* Worship in Giving
* Martha Fund

**Call to Worship**

*Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord Himself, is my strength and my defense; He has become my salvation.” With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. In that day you will say: “Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name; make known among the nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted.* (Is.12.2-4 NIV)

**Worship Songs (2)**

**Pastoral Prayer**

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Series Slide**

**Preparing for the Return Series**

**“Draw Near with a Sincere Heart”**

**Hebrews 10.19-22**

**Introduction**

Today we begin a new series of sermons entitled “Preparing for the Return.” A few weeks ago Barbara and I were visiting with some old friends and of course our conversation turned toward the virus. As we were talking my friend’s wife asked me, “Do you think that the Lord has opened one of the seals?” This question joined many others who had asked me during the pandemic if I believed that Covid-19 had anything to do with the second coming of Christ. My father always told me, “If one person says it – ten people are thinking it.” So these questions and comments started me thinking that I needed to share some thoughts about the virus and the end times.

First, let me be clear that God created and controls all things so to bring glory to Himself through the redeeming work of His Son. There is no such thing as a maverick molecule or a virus that is outside of God’s control. The pandemic is a result of a fallen world but it is not outside of God’s providential control. No one knows that day or the hour Christ’s return but we do know that *this Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.* (Acts 1.7, 11) Christ will come *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye* and at an hour you do not expect. (ICor.15.52; Mt.24.44) So, if someone says they know the exact circumstances surrounding Christ’s return we should not to listen to them or follow them. (Lk.17.23-24)

**God’s Thunderclap to Repent**

I believe that “coronavirus is God’s thunderclap call to all of us to repent and realign our lives with the infinite worth of Christ.” (John Piper) I believe that all disasters whether floods, famines, locusts, tsunamis, hurricanes, or disease are opportunities for us to repent and realign ourselves with the infinite worth of Christ. We must take advantage of this opportunity to repent of our pride to think that we live, move, and exist in our own power instead of embracing that truth that in Him we live, and move, and exist. (Acts 17.28) Brothers and sisters, we tend forget that we are feeble and live in a fallen world where bad things happen every day and in every generation. We tend to forget that creation is in a state of corruption and groans to be set free from its bondage to decay. (Rom.8.18-22) We tend to forget the disasters and disease are opportunities to remind us that even though we are feeble and fallen in all of these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us being convinced that *neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Rom.8.37-39)

**Preparing for the Return**

Regardless of your view of the Last Days or the second coming of Christ, the overwhelming weight of Scripture is not on the exact details and circumstances surrounding Christ’s return but on the importance for each of us to be preparing for His return. From the parable of the servant that the master finds faithfully overseeing his master’s possessions. Or the parable of the prudent virgins who took an abundance of oil with their lamps as they waited for their bridegroom to return the main emphasis is on preparing for the return of Christ. Every believer in every generation is to live in preparation for the return of Christ. If any good can come from Covid-19 maybe it is not only for us to repent of our pride but to awaken us to prepare for the return.

Our main text for this series is Hebrews 10.19-25. In this passage the writer of Hebrews issues five ways we are to prepare for Christ return. As I read the text this morning see if you can pick out the five ways to prepare ourselves. Hear now the Word of God.

***19****Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,****20****by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,****21****and since we have a great priest over the house of God,****22****let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.****23****Let us hold fast the*

*confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;****24****and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,****25****not forsaking our own*

*assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

***And all the more as you see the day drawing near***

You see that passage ends with the phrase “*and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”* “*The day*” is referring to the day of the Lord or the day Christ returns. The writer of Hebrews makes the simple calculation that even though we don’t know the day Christ will return we do know that Christ’s return is closer today than what it was yesterday and at each passing day the Lord’s return is “*drawing near*.” As I mentioned before the divinely inspired writer issues five ways we are to prepare for Christ return. We are called to draw near with a sincere heart, hold fast the confession of our hope, consider how to simulate one another to love and good deeds, assemble together, and encourage one another but notice that we are to do each of these things *all the more* as we see the day drawing near. This is the acceleration mandate of the advancement of the principles of the kingdom of God in our lives. The believer is not to take ease in Zion but rather to accelerate the advancement of the kingdom of God in and through the lives.

We are called to draw near with a sincere heart all the more as we see the day drawing near. We are called to hold fast the confession of our hope all the more as we see the day drawing near. We are to consider how to simulate one another to love and good deeds all the more as we see the day drawing near. We are called to assemble together all the more as we see the day drawing near. We are called to encourage one another all the more as we see the day drawing near.

The first exhortation is to draw near to God with a sincere heart. The premise of this exhortation is based on the finished work of Jesus Christ as our great high priest. Allow me to read this portion of the main text again.

***19****Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,****20****by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,****21****and since we have a great priest over the house of God,****22****let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

***Draw Near***

This portion begins with the word “*therefore*” that refers to the previous section where Christ is presented as the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins. (Heb.10.1-18) Now we are invited to enter the holy place with confidence. This echoes an earlier exhortation in chapter four where we are called to approach the throne of grace with confidence. (Heb.4.16) The reason for our confidence is not because of our works but rather because of the blood of Jesus. In the Old Testament the high priest would enter the holy place to offer the blood of goats and calves as signs and symbols that pointed to Christ. But now our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ has entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood. Christ entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb.9.11-12) And now those who have been sanctified but the blood of Christ are exhorted to draw near with confidence. Not cowering or in fear of condemnation but with confidence in the finished work of Christ.

Christ’s sacrifice of Himself without blemish to God opened a new a living way for the believer to approach God. Not with signs and symbols. Not with rituals and regulations. But a new and living way that leads into the very presence of God without roadblocks, barriers, or dead ends. Christ *inaugurated* this new and living way to God through the sacrifice of His own flesh. By the sacrifice of Himself on the cross, Christ opened the new and living way to approach God. Just like the veil was torn from top to bottom when Jesus breathed His last breath opened the holy place to all so the body of Jesus had to be broken and His blood had to be shed to open the new and living way into the holy place with God. *And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Here the writer issues three ways we should be drawing near to God. *Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. Let us draw near . . . having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. Let us draw near . . . having our bodies washed with pure water.*And remember we are called to be drawing near to God in these three ways all the more as we see the day drawing near. So let’s look at each of them separately.

***Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith***

First, we are exhorted to draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. The believer must examine the sincerely of their heart. Our hearts must be absent of hypocrisy, deception, and deceit. Our hearts must be genuine, committed, and steadfast. And the determination of a sincere heart is discovered in a person with full assurance of faith in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A person of sincere faith that is no longer acting like a child, being tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;but rather is growing up in all aspects into Christ. (Eph.4.14-15)

The assurance of faith in the finished work of Christ is like a magnet that draws us into a deeper and deeper relationship with the Lord as we discover the beautiful realities of the gospel in Christ. We must come to God in full assurance of faith. Not works, not self-righteousness. Faith! The inspired writer tells us in chapter eleven, *“He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that”* – what? - *“diligently seek Him.”* (Heb.11.6) Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith all the more as we see the day drawing near.

***Let us draw near . . . having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience***

As we draw near to God through Christ with full assurance of faith we are called to have our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. The Greek word translated “conscience” in all New Testament references is *suneidēsis*, which means “moral awareness” or “moral consciousness.” Everyone has a conscience. But in our fallen condition our conscience has become defiled (Tit.1.15), contaminated (Heb.9.14), and evil (Heb.10.22). The Apostle Paul alludes to the evil conscience when he writes, *“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”* (Rom.1.21) Paul goes on to describe the fruits of an evil conscience as *filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful.* (Rom.1.29-31) As unbelievers we find ways to justified our unrighteous and sinful behavior but when we come to faith in Christ we need our hearts sprinkled clean from our evil conscience. We believe that Christ is faithful and just to forgive us our sins but we also must have faith that the blood of Christ cleanses us from all unrighteousness. As believers in Christ we draw near to God knowing that Christ has forgiven our sins and has removed all the guilt and condemnation associated with our sins. *There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* (Rom.8.1)

The "sprinkling" refers to the Old Testament rite of the sprinkling of blood to make atonement for sin. The meaning is clear. As believers we look to the blood of Christ as the full payment for our sins. His broken body - His slaughter is the "sprinkling of blood" that cleanses from sin. Christ’s death has fulfilled God’s demand for justice, and by His stripes, we are healed. Real forgiveness in Christ restores the soul. It unburdens the heart. A life set free from guilt is a life free to live in the fullness of joy! And when the burden of a guilt-ridden conscience is removed, we’ve been cleansed from an evil conscience. The precious blood of Jesus Christ removes the evil conscience, that condemning, guilty feeling, and we don’t condemn ourselves anymore. Let us draw near . . . having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience all the more as we see the day drawing near.

***Let us draw near . . . having our bodies washed with pure water***

Having dealt with the inner part of man by having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience now the inspired writer moves to the cleansing of the outer man by – having our bodies washed with pure water. Here the writer is addressing the physical acts of sin – transgressions. As Paul writes, *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.* (Eph.1.7) *He made you alive together with Christ, having forgiven us all our transgressions.* (Col.2.13) Just like a good bath cleanses us from all the dirt and contaminates of this world so the blood of Christ cleanses us of all the filthiness of our sinful actions. *Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.* (Eph.5.25-27) That is God’s promise for you in Christ. He cleanses us through Christ in both body and soul. Let us draw near . . . having our bodies washed with pure water all the more as we see the day drawing near.

**Closing Thought**

Brothers and sisters, lets take advantage of this opportunity to repent of our pride thinking that we live, move, and exist in our own power instead of embracing that truth that in God alone we live, and move, and exist. Living in South Florida we are very familiar with how the sound of thunder can get our attention. Maybe God is trying to get our attention. And even though we don’t know the day or the hour, lets take full advantage to prepare for Christ’s return by*drawing near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*Maybe you are experiencing a crisis of faith and you need the Holy Spirit to give you a full assurance of faith in Christ. Maybe your soul is being suffocated by guilt and you need the Holy Spirit unburden your heart to draw near to God in freedom. Maybe you feel dirty by transgressions you have committed and you need the Holy Spirit to pour out God’s grace and forgiven upon you. Whatever the situation you find yourself draw near to God all the more as you see the day drawing near.

**Call to Prayer**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
    Try me and know my thoughts!*

*And see if there be any grievous way in me,
    and lead me in the way everlasting!* (Ps.139.23-24)

**Benediction**

*He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,**so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.* (Titus 3.5-7)