

**+ Hebrews 10:19-25 + I'm Glad We Came to Church Today! +  
+ 9th Sunday after Pentecost<sup>1</sup> + 26 July 2015 +**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

So how excited were you to get up this morning? As soon as your alarm clock went off did your eyes pop open and you were ready and rarin' to go as soon as your feet hit the floor? Were you full of energy and excitement because "Today's a new day! Alright! It's Sunday! I get to go to church today!"? Or perhaps your reaction was a little bit more like my children. "Aargh! Why did I set an alarm? Can't I sleep in longer? Well at least it's the weekend. Oh wait! It's Sunday and I have to go to church!"

I understand if you weren't all full of energy when you got out of bed this morning or if your jump was more of a slow, dragging roll out of bed, but I'm glad you're here today. I'm glad you came to church today. I'm glad we came to church today. You know it's pretty amazing that you're here.

I know that you might think, "Well, I go to church here because this is a church or a church body that I attend." Some of you have heard me say this before, but I'm always amazed that when I step out the door (and there will be a new door eventually on the other side of the building), that I step out and there are actually people here.

Of all the places you could go and of all the things you could do, you came here. People like you have been coming here to this place that has officially occupied this corner for 34 years, 2 months, and 23 days. It's amazing! The Lord has blessed us with a very full room today and it's amazing because it speaks to what God the Holy Spirit has done in your life.

For some of you, maybe you've been coming to this church since childhood—perhaps even infancy. This is where your parents brought you to be baptized. They brought you here to hear the Word of God. Perhaps you bring your own children or grandchildren. Perhaps you've been coming here since you were a teen or your college years. Perhaps your parents brought you to an event at some point or they decided, "Let's check out that strange-looking church on the corner"—and they kept coming back.

Perhaps you've been coming here since you were an adult. You came along with a friend or married someone who was going to church here. Your kids—you wanted them to hear the Word of God and you kept driving by this place and you wanted to stop here or you got an invite to something and a pesky pastor kept knocking on your door hoping you would show up. However the Lord brought you here, he guided all things so you could be here today.

Now maybe you're not a member of our congregation. Maybe you're visiting for the first time or you're visiting because you're traveling in the area or your checking out this place called Cross of Christ or simply you're helping us to expand and renovate this facility making this day necessary. I'm not going to blame you that it's your fault for today. It's okay. ☺ ...But you're here and I'm glad you came to church today. I'm glad we came to church today.

Why did you come here? Did you come here because well, it's where you've always gone or you happen to really like the people and the atmosphere or maybe just because the next WELS church is a good 70 miles or more away and this is it? Or did you come because you love Jesus and his Word? You came to be fed and nourished from his free banquet of grace. Whatever your reason might be, I'm glad you came to church today not just because this service marks the end of a 34-year chapter in our congregation's history, but because of what God gives us here.

Now in spite of the fact that he lived about 2,000 years ago, the writer of Hebrews can describe for us what God gives to us here and you might wonder, "How can he do that if he lived so far away?" You know, he's not going to talk about our classic orange carpet or the fact that we have no ceiling in the back of the church or the fact that we have this beautiful design on the front of the pulpit or the 1940s baptismal font. He's not going to talk about that, but he can talk about what God provides for us here because it's the same thing that God has provided to struggling Christians for millennia, for thousands of years. So we sit at his feet and we are encouraged and we give thanks for God's abundant grace because of what God gives us here.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the sermon for the final worship service in our 1981 facility. Unfortunately, due to technical difficulties, the sermon video is not available.

The first thing you see is an open door. You might notice that are some new doors around here and even newer doors coming in the next couple weeks. You might notice as you take a look at some of those doors and you try to use them that some of them don't seem to work very well because they don't let you in. They're locked—for security reasons much like the way we lock the front door of the church when everyone leaves. They're locked and they're functioning like they're supposed to be, but the writer points out that what God give us here is an open door that never closes, that is no longer locked to us.

He says, **“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...”** Between you and God is a locked door. It's called God's holy Law. It prevents anyone who has disobeyed God's Law in word, thought, action even in the slightest way. It prevents anyone from going in that door to God. It's doing what it's supposed to do—barring sinners out from the presence of God's holiness. In fact, sin separates us from our God and can even separate us from his love for all eternity in hell. However, that door, that way has actually been opened to us through One who came and lived a perfect life in every thought, every word, every action, One who was willing to give up his life and allow his blood to be shed to open the door for us. His body and blood opened **“a new and living way”** to the true God. Jesus opened that way for us and that door does not close to us anymore. Aren't you glad you came to church today because God has for you an open door?

We also have a great Shepherd who faithfully tends this congregation and I am not talking about myself. I'm not talking about any of the pastors who faithfully served this congregation with last names like Waldek and Kappel and Duehlmeyer and Bitter and the various other pastors who served during the Vacancy (1995-2005).

No, we're talking about the Great Priest, the Great Shepherd who is **“over the house of God...”** You see, we have a Shepherd, a priest who loves and cares for each and every one of us, who is deeply concerned about your soul, who is deeply concerned about my soul. He is concerned about every one of us. He calls each of us to repent of our sins, to turn from those sins and live, and then he says, “Here, I shed my blood for you. Your sins are forgiven. If you don't believe me, look at the nail prints in my hands and feet and the spear mark in my side.”

Though we don't deserve it, this Priest steps in between us and the holy God. He serves as our Mediator. He speaks on our behalf. Though we don't deserve it, though we deserve to be rejected and that God not hear our pleas and our prayers, Jesus says, “Here's my life. Here's my death. It's okay to listen to them because I have made them your own.” He watches over us. He watches over our coming and going. He strengthens our faith and then he gives life to our souls with precious food of grace that only he can give.

You see, here God gives us tremendous gifts. God gives us forgiving food and cleansing waters. **“...Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”** Here the Savior, the Shepherd provides his own forgiving food. With his own body and his own blood, he nourishes us. He takes away the guilt of our sins. He strengthens our faith. He gives us assurance that heaven is ours and gives us the strength to keep going with the struggle that we face day by day from our own sinful natures and from the world around us. Here at the Lord's Table, Jesus has fed countless souls with the life-giving, forgiveness-bestowing food of himself, but before that, he had to cleanse those souls.

The writer here speaks of Holy Baptism. He speaks of guilty consciences cleansed of all their guilt, of **“bodies washed with pure water.”** Perhaps you were baptized here as an infant, as a child, maybe even as an adult. At the font, parents brought little ones to the Savior's waiting arms. Here the Lord with cleansing waters forgave sin, made sinners his sons, and raised them to new life. God did that here! Now every time you come here and see the font you are reminded of what God gave you and what God did for you in those life-saving, cleansing waters.

There are a lot of great reasons we've heard already why we came here to church. Aren't you glad you came to church today? ...But you know what? There's even more because God doesn't skimp. His grace is always more than sufficient. With God there are always leftovers, but I wouldn't necessarily call these leftovers, but more gifts of grace for here God gives us a firm foundation.

In the children's talk I showed a chunk of the foundation. You might make a snappy comment about the foundation work we've had to do in the last couple years on the foundation beneath me or under the office, but no matter how strong our fixed foundation or the slab out there might be, the foundation that God gives us here is even greater. The writer encourages, **“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.”**

For a foundation to be firm, it cannot waver. It cannot wobble. It cannot be shaky. Otherwise it could mean disaster for a building or any people inside of it. The same is true for our spiritual foundation. If your hope is based on what you hope might happen in the future, you'll waver. You'll wobble and you'll crash, but if your hope is based on knowing what your God has done—that God has fulfilled every one of his promises to you in Jesus and will most certainly fulfill every promise to you in Jesus, that foundation's going nowhere. It's firm. It's solid and so we will want to stand on that. We will want to hold on to that no matter what happens in our life, no matter how shaky things feel or get in our personal lives, no matter what challenges we face in this congregation. We have that firm foundation—and that's only possible when God's Word is taught without wavering. By God's grace, that's what has happened in this place in the last 34 years. God's Word has been taught in its truth and purity without wavering. God in his grace has given us here a firm foundation in Jesus.

Now there's even more because here we have a beloved family. Here we have mothers and fathers in the faith, grandmas and grandpas in Jesus, brothers and sisters in Christ. Perhaps it's due to our small size or the unique challenges our congregation has faced or just simply God put it in our DNA, but there is something of a uniquely warm and welcoming spirit here at Cross of Christ for everyone who comes through the door. We're sinners. It's not perfect. We fail. Sometimes we have to remember to speak slowly and listen quickly, but God has given us that as a gift.

The writer urges us, **“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”** Here in this church family, there are shoulders to cry on. If you need a hug, I can name 6 or 7 people who will give you a hug right then. There's comfort for the grieving, help for the struggling, and even encouragement for the straying. Why? Because Jesus has made us members of his family. He has made us members of his beloved family—sons and daughters of the king, not slaves, not servants, not distant cousins, but sons and daughters. That impacts who we are. God provides that family for us when we grieve the loss of a loved one, when we struggle with whatever happens to be going on in our lives as Satan and our sinful natures and the sinful world do everything they can to tear us away from this beloved family that God has given to us.

So **“let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”** It's very tempting to hit the snooze button and go back to sleep on a Sunday morning, isn't it? Yet we don't because here we gather around God's Word and Sacraments. Here we're equipped to serve. Here we're encouraged with the Gospel, and then we go out to the personal mission fields in which our Lord has placed us. That's why we meet here week in and week out until Christ returns or calls us home.

I'm glad we came to church today. Yes, today we're ending a long and important chapter in the life of this congregation just as we're turning the page to a whole new chapter with its own share of sorrows and joys, challenges and blessings, grace upon grace upon grace.

What we have here is more important than this 1981 facility or its new expansion down the hall, because here we have Jesus. Here is where Jesus comes to you and me through the Gospel, through the spoken and sung and heard Word and Sacraments and through the admonition and encouragement of others. Here is where we find comfort and peace and joy and purpose and help and strength and so much more in Jesus. Here we see how Jesus has fulfilled his promise—so eloquently written on a stud in my new office, **“Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.”** (Matthew 18:20)

As we conclude 34¼ years in this sanctuary, let's heed those words of the writer to the Hebrews. Let's remember what God provides here for his people in his church. Let's rejoice with those who say to us, **“Let us go to the house of the Lord”** (Psalm 122:1), because what we have here God gives us until Jesus comes again in glory to bring us to our heavenly home. Amen.

May the LORD our God be with us as he was with our fathers; may he never leave us nor forsake us. Amen.