

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

HE WHO PROMISED IS FAITHFUL

Hebrews 10:18-25; Terry Rippentrop Funeral; June 5, 2024

A week ago last Friday LaVon called to tell me that Terry was in the hospital in Rochester and not doing well. In fact, he had made a decision to stop any further treatment for his cancer and receive only comfort care until he died. Since LaVon and Troy were heading to Rochester, I offered to meet them there and see Terry in the hospital. I did not know how long he was going to live. When I got to his room, Troy was already there and LaVon would arrive shortly.

Visiting with Terry, he told me very matter-of-factly, "I'm going tonight." I thought of asking, "Going where?" I wasn't sure what he meant so I asked him. He told me, "They are going to turn off everything, and I'm going to die tonight." I've been a pastor for almost 35 years, and I've never had someone say anything like that to me. Thankfully, Terry and I had a little time alone to discuss the implications of his coming death while Troy went to get their mother down at the entrance to the hospital. Terry was off a little on his timing, but he did die the following day.

While the details of today's Funeral Service are the same as for his father, Tom, I have chosen as the text for Terry's funeral Sermon, Hebrews 10:18-25. The Sermon Theme, "He Who Promised Is Faithful," is based on verse 23. which notes God's faithfulness to us in Jesus Christ.

Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Why did I choose this text, beside the fact that it is one of my favorite texts in all of Scripture? Let's look first at how it ends. **...encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.** The "Day" the writer to the Hebrews is referring to primarily is the Last Day, the end of this world when Jesus returns in glory to judge the living and the dead. As we watch the world we currently live in fall apart and cause us pain and suffering, displaying the signs Jesus and others in Scripture noted will mark the end of this age, we need some encouragement. That the Last Day is coming is encouraging in itself. Suffering will come to an end on the Last Day, our mortal bodies will be raised from the dead, and everlasting life with God will begin. Whenever we are forced to gather for the funeral of a loved one who is a Christian, we are thankful for this encouragement.

But for Terry less than two weeks ago in the hospital, the **Day** of meeting His Lord in glory was drawing very near. He thought it would be later that night. It ended up being the next day. As we **meet together** today in church, we can **encourage one another** even as we sorrow over Terry's death. The Day is drawing nearer when we will die and join him before our Lord, or the Lord Himself will come with a shout and trumpet call and all the dead are raised.

Why should this be our hope in faith? The writer to the Hebrews tells us: **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.** Our assurance of salvation when facing God the judge on the Last Day is that God is faithful to us even when we are not faithful to Him.

Based on the faithfulness of God toward us, I am confident that, when his body died, Terry's soul went to heaven to be with God where it waits for the Day of resurrection. But if I had to put my confidence in anything Terry did in his life to earn this, my hope would be dashed, and we would have nothing to encourage one another with. There was a lot wrong with Terry – besides the cancer – that should have kept him from heaven. He was not always faithful to God like he should have been. He died while a sinner, like all of us will, but God was faithful to him and God will be faithful to us.

In my conversation with Terry while we were still alone, I asked him about his lack of fear in the face of his looming death. The first answers I got from him were not encouraging, thought typical of what I hear from others when they are asked about how God will receive them when they die. He said he tried to live the way he should. He prayed to God. He essentially dismissed as significant that he had quit going to church years ago. All this flies in the face of what our text says it means to be a Christian. To “**not waver in our confession**” also means “**not neglecting to meet together,**” which describes Christians worshiping together in person, if they can, in church.

When God’s Word says to “**hold fast the confession of our hope**” it means “**not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.**” It was Terry’s habit – like many others – to neglect coming to the Lord’s house faithfully to hear His Word and receive the Sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood for the forgiveness of his sins. By this, Terry was being unfaithful to God and the promises he made to God, especially on the day of his Confirmation. To make it our habit to not meet together in God’s house is a sin against God and each other that needs forgiveness. We are unfaithful, but **He who promised is faithful**. God remains faithful despite Terry’s and our unfaithfulness.

God’s faithfulness is described in great detail in these verses. There is no longer any **offering for sin** because Jesus has provided the once for all sacrifice of His body and blood on the cross for the **forgiveness** for our sin. We can enter with **confidence** the **holy places** of God – in church right now on earth, especially when God draws near to us in the Lord’s Supper, and finally before God in heaven “**by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His flesh... Since we have a great Priest over the house of God, let us draw near 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.**”

I reminded Terry that his confidence in the face of death was misplaced if he looked to anything in himself. His confidence needed to be in Jesus Christ alone, which he then went on to confess.

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LaVon and Troy got to the room and then it became the time to confess our sins to God and celebrate the forgiveness of our sins, life, and salvation in receiving the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper. By the blood and through the flesh of Jesus the way is opened for us through the curtain of death to enter the holy of holies of our great Priest, Jesus Christ, who sacrificed His flesh and shed His blood on the cross to wash away our sins. With our sins forgiven, our guilt is taken away, our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water, a reference to God's saving work through Holy Baptism.

God made promises to Terry when he was baptized: to wash away his sin and make him God's own child. God remained faithful to Terry in this. So when Terry's last hour came on this earth and he took his last breath, his hope was not about how well he had kept his promises to God and others, but how completely God had kept His promises to him. **He who promised is faithful.** Let us encourage one another with this, even as we see the Day drawing near. Amen.