

October 10, 2021
Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Hebrews 3:12-19

EXHORT ONE ANOTHER FOR WE SHARE IN CHRIST.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Epistle letter to the Hebrews, the 3rd chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Unlike most other New Testament epistles, the anonymous *letter* to the Hebrews is more of a *sermon* than it is a *letter*. The unknown writer calls his letter a: “*word of exhortation*.” (cf: Hebrews 13:22) Biblical exhortation is when you instill courage into a fellow believer by encouraging them and strengthen their faith in Christ, lest they grow weary and fall into unbelief. (cf: TDNT, 795-796) While the sermon to the Hebrews is an exhortation to Jewish Christians who were considering renouncing Christianity and returning to Judaism, it is also an exhortation to brothers and sisters in Christ of all times, including you and me today.

In verse 14 of our text, he writes:

“*For we share in Christ...*” (Hebrews 3:14)

You and me and all who are *in Christ, share in Christ*. You have been redeemed by Jesus sacrificial death on the cross on your behalf and are declared righteous in God’s sight by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. It was either in the holy waters of Baptism or in the preaching of the Gospel that God created faith within you and gave you the gift of the Holy Spirit. (cf: Acts 2:38; Romans 10:17) The writer to the Hebrews calls all who trust in Christ to:

“... *exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’...*” (Hebrews 3:13)

You may ask: “*If God has done all the saving, why do I need to help with the exhortation? Why must we encourage and strengthen one another every day?*” The short answer is, because in Baptism, you were marked with the sign of the cross – and the devil sees that cross and knows not only who you are but also, *Whose* you are. The devil desires that you belong to him. Resist the devil and stand firm in your faith. (cf: 1 Peter 5:9)

Ever since the fall of Adam in the Garden, all mankind and the earth are evil and corrupt. It was in the Garden that the crafty serpent, the devil himself, deceived the man and woman. So, God put the devil on notice that Jesus’ cross-bruised heel would one day crush his deceitful head in defeat. And indeed, by His suffering and death on Calvary’s cross, Christ defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil. *Today*, the devil is bound so that the Gospel may be freely proclaimed throughout the world, creating and sustaining faith in the hearts of all who believe. But even

though the devil is bound and defeated, he remains a dangerous enemy. In our Lord God's rich wisdom, He allows the devil to rage among us. He will stop at nothing in attempt to deceive you, hoping to lead you away from faith so that you fall into unbelief. It happens all the time. Even to those of great faith.

The Lord God chose Israel as His own nation and was gracious to them. He called Moses to lead His children out of bondage and into the Promised Land. (cf: Exodus 3:10) With Moses leading the way, God brought them out of slavery, while performing great acts of judgement and deliverance. The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night and did not depart from them. (cf: Exodus 13:21–22) He spoke to His people through Moses, giving them His Commandments, His literal Words to live by. (cf: Exodus 20:1–17) He loved them. He protected them. He gave them food and drink. And yet His chosen people rebelled. They rebelled against the Lord God and against his servant Moses. They grumbled and complained, refusing to believe and trust that God was actually present among them, directing them through His Word – and they repeatedly sinned against the Lord. So, for 40 years, the Lord God made them wander in the wilderness until an entire generation had fallen dead in the wilderness, even including the Lord's servant Moses. (cf: Numbers 32:13; Deuteronomy 34:4–5) An entire generation was unable to enter the Promised Land because of sin and unbelief. (cf: Hebrews 3:19)

This is why you and I are called to exhort and encourage and strengthen one another in faith every day. The devil is lurking. He will stop at nothing in attempt to deceive you, lead you away from faith so that you fall into unbelief. It happens all the time. Adam and Eve fell. A generation of Israelites and Moses fell. And so do you and I. The writer exhorts you and me to:

"¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12)

Sin is deceitful. Sin kills. When you play with fire, you get burned. When you play around with sin, even little white lies and gray lines, sin becomes familiar and non-threatening until, finally, to you, it feels safe. Even for the strongest believer, the attraction and desire to sin never diminishes as the devil lulls your old Adam into believing you have your own sin under control. A whole generation of Israelites witnessed the power and glory of God on their behalf – yet they were led into sin and unbelief. And your sin is just as deadly.

You and me and all who share in Christ are called to strengthen one another by mutual exhortation ***every day***, back and forth, encouraging one another in the faith, "... ***every day, as long as it is called 'today.'***" Isn't that phrase peculiar? "... ***every day, as long as it is called 'today.'***" Isn't every day called "***today?***" The writer reveals in verse 15 what he means by quoting Psalm 95.

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."
(Hebrews 3:15)

These first century Hebrew Christians, knew the Psalms. They knew that in the verse immediately prior to the one quoted, the Psalmist writes:

"⁷ For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. [and goes on to write] Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts..." (Psalm 95:7–8)

They knew that the Psalmist is speaking of Jesus who said:

"¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

They knew that the voice the Psalmist is referring to is the voice of the Good Shepherd.

"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them..." (John 10:3)

He is the greater Moses who leads you out of the bondage of your sin and into the Promised Land of eternal life.

The day that is called "**today**" in our text is referring to Christ's time of grace. It's the period of time between the day when Christ defeated death and bound the devil and the Last Day when Christ returns in glory to raise the dead in Christ. **Today** is the day of your salvation. **Today** is the day of salvation for all whose hearts are not hardened to the Gospel and the call of the Holy Spirit so that they are enlightened by His gifts, sanctified, and kept in the true faith. (cf: SC Art II, 6)

Yesterday, God sent His Son Christ Jesus into the world to do His will and work of salvation on behalf of all mankind. **Yesterday**, it was for your sake that God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him you might become the righteousness of God. (cf: 2 Corinthians 5:21)

Yesterday, He was delivered into a bloody death to pay for your trespasses and was raised for your justification. (cf: Romans 4:25) **Yesterday**, He ascended into heaven to rule over all creation. **Yesterday** was the day that God's plan of salvation was made possible.

Tomorrow, in the future, your salvation will be brought to completion. **Tomorrow**, Christ will return to usher in a new heaven and a new earth, a perfectly restored creation. **Tomorrow**, He will raise the dead in Christ and unite their restored and glorified bodies with their souls in heaven. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:52–54) **Tomorrow**, sin, death, and corruption will be destroyed. **Tomorrow**, the devil and his demonic host will be finally cast into the lake of fire and sulfur where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (cf: Revelation 20:10)

That brings us back to **today**. You cannot bring **yesterday** back. **Tomorrow** on earth is not promised. You are only given **today**. And **today**, the devil is lurking. He desires to deceive you so that your heart might be hardened and indifferent to the danger of sin. For, no sinner ever has his sin under control. **Yesterday's** faith does not save a person **today**. Strong believers can grow old with hardened hearts and fall into unbelief. What matters is what is done **today**. As long as it is **today**, cling to Christ and His promises made you in Baptism, exhorting and encouraging one another with the truths you share in Christ. What are those truths? In His Large Catechism, Luther writes:

"... every Christian has enough in Baptism to learn and to do all his life. For he has always enough to do by believing firmly what Baptism promises and brings: victory over death and the devil [Romans 6:3–6], forgiveness of sin [Acts

2:38], *God's grace* [Titus 3:5–6], *the entire Christ, and the Holy Spirit with His gifts* [1 Corinthians 6:11].” (LC, Part 4, 41)

“So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, ‘Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.’” (LC, Part 4, 44)

Encourage one another with truths such as, when God adopted you into His Holy family, He made you a member of the body of Christ, of which there are many members, with Christ as its head.

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26–27)

As the head of the body, Christ doesn't come among you in a pillar of cloud or by a pillar of fire. He comes to you *today* wherever two or three are gathered in His Name. (cf: Matthew 18:20) He comes to you *today* in the remembrance of your Baptism. He comes to you *today* and forgives your sins in the Absolution. He comes to you in the preaching of His Word. He comes to you in His body and blood given and shed for you, to strength and keep you in body and soul unto life everlasting.

Daily clinging to Christ and encouraging one another in faith is a sure defense against unbelief. Every day that is called “*today*” becomes one more in a progression of *today's*, which create good routines and habits. And all these *today's* will build and build and be brought to completion at the day of our Lord Jesus Christ in eternity forever. (cf: Philippians 1:6)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.