

Wavering Faith
Hebrews 10:19-25
Trinity Presbyterian Church
28 March 2021

This is the first day of what we often call Holy Week – the week leading up to Jesus introducing the New Covenant with the bread and cup shared with His disciples, His betrayal, and the illegal mock trial, His crucifixion to meet God's just demand for payment for our sin – and His resurrection. But the week starts off with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem that we read about in Luke 19:35-38. These verses are the backdrop for today's message.

What troubled days these are! We hear so many conflicting reports in the news and on social media and from friends, we don't know who to believe! If you are like I am, you have lost confidence in most sources of information! Is it true? Believable? You hardly know which way to turn because the rules and regulations, information and disinformation seem to be changing every day! Where do we find solid ground as we waver between this fact and that fact, this party and that party, this way to protect your neighbor and that way?

Not only are we confused with information and disinformation, but we feel attacked on every side for the positions we hold politically, economically, socially – even biologically! It makes you want to run away and hide – but where would you go? Or you want to strike out against anybody whose ideas or opinions are different from yours. And we waver – helplessly, hostilely, never finding solid ground.

The book of Hebrews was written in confusing times, too. Christians were feeling pressed on every side – attacked for their beliefs and practices, vilified as the enemy, chased out of town, subjected to severe persecution. To the point they were being tempted to turn back to Judaism and just blend in with the world around them – tempted to waver in their faith.

The writer of Hebrews addresses these stressed and wavering believers with proof after proof of the superiority of Jesus and His once-for-all-time sacrifice to pay the sin debt of His people. Safety and eternal security can be found nowhere else.

We need the same message today. Ultimate safety and security cannot be found in vaccines against Covid-19 or in anti-virus programs for your computer, or in LifeLock for your digital information. Safety and security cannot be found in following various social and political theories. Safety and security can be found only in Jesus.

The people in Jesus' time were also looking for safety and security. They thought they had found it when the miracle-worker, that wonderful, powerful, gentle teacher, leader, and rabbi Jesus of Nazareth came to Jerusalem. They just knew He was coming to overthrow their Roman oppressors and restore the Jewish nation to its proper place again. Finally – their own King to kick out the oppressors and sit on David's throne!

On this Palm Sunday we will be reading from Hebrews chapter 10, verses 19 to 25. Many of us may be ready to wave palm branches or flags or something to welcome in a savior who will chase away covid, drive out those who would turn our country into something the founders never envisioned, and make everything right again – at least as we envision right – so we can finally stand without wavering.

Will the Spirit speak to us today through the writer of Hebrews as He did to those Hebrew believers so long ago? Out of reverence for the King whose Word this is, please stand as I read Hebrews 10:19-25.

Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!

Oh, how happy the people were that day! What a joyful sound! What bright colors as people swirled off their cloaks and laid them before His majestic entry. Knives flashed in the morning sun as

people sliced branches off palm trees and ran waving them before Jesus. Yes! Hosanna! Our King is coming!

Jesus. Riding on a colt, the foal of a donkey, his feet nearly snagging on the cloaks and branches carpeting the way. His warm gaze takes in the smiling faces, the jubilant upraised arms, and the happy running children. The scene wavers before Him as tears fill His eyes. Tears for these dear people of the City of Peace, Jerusalem.

Fast-forward now a few days. The scene is in the courtyard of Pontius Pilate. The Son of David, the Prince of Peace, the King – is now bound, half-stripped, beaten. He raises His head and looks about. No more smiles and cheers – only sneers and jeers. Angry, contorted faces glistening in the noonday sun and screaming, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” The faces waver in his sweat-washed vision – the very same faces that were just cheering Him only a few days ago. Faces just like – yours and mine.

Oh, how fickle we are! How we waver in our faith. How quickly we forget all Jesus has done for us. How can we ever hope to stand **boldly** before God if we are forever wavering? And yet our pastor in Hebrews assures us that we can. Look again at verses 19 to 21: “Therefore, having **boldness to enter** the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a **High Priest** over the house of God...”

Jesus is identified as our High Priest because He not only **offered** the sacrifice for our sin, but He **was** that sacrifice. Sin has separated all mankind from Holy God. The veil in the temple pictures that separation. When Jesus met God’s just demands for the death penalty for sinners by dying on the **cross** for us, the veil was torn to show that we can now come before the face of God. But only those who have confessed their guilt and trusted that finished work of Jesus are welcomed into God’s presence. When you’ve done that, then you can come **before God in the Holiest of places boldly for Jesus, our High Priest, has opened the way.**

Since our High Priest has opened the way into the presence of God, believers must enter boldly. (vv. 19-21)

Come with me now and see how we must approach, apprehend and applaud as we enter boldly....

Since our High Priest has opened the way into the presence of God, believers must approach boldly. (v 22)

Look at verse 22 – “...let us **draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” The crowds were certainly bold that day outside of Jerusalem as they proclaimed, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the LORD!”

How do we approach boldly?

We must be **washed**. This is something much more significant than taking a shower before coming to church. Old Testament sacrifices were **washed** before being offered. This reference to **washing** is used as a picture to show the effect of the Word of God on our activities. If our bodies are dedicated to God, **washed as it were**, like those Old Testament sacrifices, then our activities carried out in the body will also be dedicated to God – **washed** and set aside for His service. We must be **washed** before we can approach our Holy God.

We ask ourselves again, how can we approach God boldly?

In full **assurance**. Having been washed, made clean by the blood of Jesus, we are now ready to approach God in full **assurance** of faith! And what is faith? Heb.11:1 shows us that faith is “the **assurance** of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” We can come before God with **assurance** that rests on Jesus and His work, not on anything at all in us.

*President Daniel arap Moi was a powerful man in Kenya. I was invited once to accompany some church leaders on a visit to President Moi. Excited about meeting this famous man and eager to see for myself just what he was like, I was nervous, too. Who was I, an insignificant missionary from way out in the sticks, to stand before this man? I had no **assurance** of my right to be in that position.*

*The morning of the visit arrived and you can bet I made sure I was **washed** and dressed in a way that would not embarrass my church companions or myself. I didn't want to look as if I'd just come from the bush!*

*At the president's residence I made sure I stayed in the company of my church hosts. They were my ticket to be there. Without them, I had no **assurance** of being accepted before the President.*

*After a long wait, President Moi finally made his appearance. I stood in a long line, flanked by my church friends and waited for my opportunity to greet this great man. As he approached, I realized that I had no need to fear. I could shake his hand in **full assurance** knowing that I was prepared and covered – **washed and sprinkled**, as it were.*

Those very few moments I had to exchange a few words with the President of Kenya were but a small foretaste of the **idea** of being able to approach God boldly. I had **full assurance** of my right to greet the President of Kenya because I knew I was prepared and in the company of those who would vouch for me. Just as we are prepared, **washed and sprinkled**, by trusting Jesus. **He** has opened the way for us to approach God boldly. He vouches for those who have trusted Him alone for forgiveness and hope. We don't approach on our own merit, but His. He stands beside us as our Advocate that we may enter in without wavering or fear, knowing we can approach God Almighty with **assurance** – the **assurance** of Jesus, God's Son, our High Priest.

Jesus has opened the way into God's presence – we must approach Him boldly. But too often we just don't feel that we have the right. Maybe you've just had an argument with your wife. You feel frustrated and rattled and angry – anything but bold and **assured**. You know you shouldn't have lost your temper, but the words were out before you could stop them. And now you feel defiled. Who wants to stand before God with a guilty conscience? All the water in the world won't **wash** that away. This is exactly when we need to remember that Jesus has already **washed** our hearts clean with His blood if we have trusted Him for eternal life. Our **assurance** to enter into the presence of God doesn't depend on anything we've done, but only trusting the finished work of Jesus.

Maybe it's something else that is making your conscience feel evil. Using company funds entrusted to your care for your own business. Passing on that last little bit of gossip you heard about your neighbor. Maybe it is the way you spoke to or about somebody in our church family. Yes, we all waver in our daily lives. We don't have to lay tattered cloaks and wilted branches before our Lord. He has **washed** our consciences clean and we can enter into the presence of God with **full assurance** of faith.

Yes, Jesus, our High Priest, has prepared us well to approach boldly as we enter into God's holy presence. But we must remember something else that will help us not to waver as we enter into His presence:

Since our High Priest has opened the way into the presence of God, believers must apprehend boldly.

Look at verse 23 – “Let us **hold fast** the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.” What a wonderful verse! Those cheering crowds outside of Jerusalem were **holding fast** to their hope that Jesus had come to set them free, to make everything right again.

Just how are **we** to apprehend this hope?

Without **wavering**. This means that we maintain this hope through all circumstances of life. We don't praise God when the sun's shining and grumble when it's cloudy – smile when everything's going

our way and complain when it isn't. It means that we consistently hold fast to, **apprehend**, that finished work of Jesus Christ – and nothing else.

That all sounds fine, you say. But on what ground can I apprehend this hope?

Because He who promised is **faithful**! I can't apprehend this hope by dint of my own hard work or optimistic personality or the faith of my parents or anything else – except on the sure ground of the **faithfulness** of the One Who made the promise. Listen to Deuteronomy 7:9, “**Know** therefore that Jehovah your God is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands.” Yes! We can – and must – hold unswervingly to our hope because He who promised is faithful!

The sun beat mercilessly on the four men as they worked. The hard, heavy wood must be sawn into boards, shaped and joined – all by hand. The father called a break as their wives brought jugs of water and loaves of bread for their noonday meal. Slumping against the pile of boards, they surveyed what had been accomplished so far. The structure rose up against the brassy sky looking stark and unfinished. How discouraging! They had been working on this giant box for a hundred years and still weren't finished.

*There were times when they **wavered** in their drive and hope. Especially when crowds would gather round and taunt. They talked to the people about the immanent danger and that they needed to trust God and not be so bent on just having a good time. But nobody listened.*

*This had been going on for a hundred years! Noah would have **wavered** long ago – if he hadn't believed in the **faithfulness** of God. Yahweh had promised not only destruction for all who wouldn't worship Him, but rescue in this unlikely-looking giant box for all who did. And Noah believed God. Noah knew his own weakness. He knew that if he and his family were to be rescued it would depend on the strength of the One making the promise, not the ones believing the promise. Noah knew that he could apprehend the hope of rescue without **wavering** because he knew Yahweh would be **faithful** in bringing about His promises.*

We, too, must trust Jehovah God, for He is the same today as He was in the days of Noah. He is **faithful**. He has promised eternal life to those who place their hope in Him. Whether we **waver** or not, He remains **faithful**. His **faithfulness** is the basis for our hope, just as it was for Noah.

How about you? Do you find yourself **wavering** in your hope and wondering if you are going to be able to hold on long enough to make it to the end? Do you doubt if your beliefs are really the right ones sometimes? If push came to shove, could you make a defense of what you believe?

Picture yourself in a discussion with friends or family and the issue of abortion comes up. You take it about as long as you can and then you plunge into the conversation. You are bravely defending what the Bible teaches about the sanctity of life, but your friends are taunting you with, “That's not the way the world works any more.” And then they call you immoral and arrogant for holding such narrow view-points. And you begin to **waver**. Am I really right? What right do I have to push my beliefs on them?

Later that night as you recall the conversation, your face burns with shame for you know you should have been clearer, bolder in presenting God's truth. The palm branches you were waving for Jesus were pretty wilted. The cloak of your best efforts you threw before Him was shabby. But you take comfort in knowing, beyond a shadow of doubt that the promise of eternal life on which your hope hangs is grounded on God's **faithfulness** and not yours. Whether you are a farmer, a student, a mom or missionary you must apprehend boldly the hope of eternal life, based not on your **wavering** performance, but on the **faithfulness** of God.

Our High Priest has opened the way into the presence of the Living God so that we can approach Him boldly, apprehend boldly the confession of our hope and now we respond with applause!

Since our High Priest has opened the way into the presence of God, believers must applaud boldly. Those followers of Jesus were certainly applauding boldly as they cheered and waved and accompanied Jesus into the city!

Now, look at verses 24 and 25 in our Hebrews passage. “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”

No, the word applaud doesn’t appear in these verses. But the **idea** is here. When you go to a football game, what do you do to encourage your favorite player? You yell, whistle, jump up and down – and you applaud!

We can note two things about this bold applause: its format and its function.

The format for applause is in **community**. Note the warning in verse 25 about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. This is not simply a frustrated preacher haranguing absent parishioners. This is a much deeper warning that refers to the mindset of self-sufficiency, independence and human-centered thinking. It can start with planning your work week during worship services as your mind wanders. And then it goes to skipping daily time with God. And little by little you find that you just don’t seem to need the **community** of Christ – or Jesus Himself. It’s a strong warning to be on guard against developing a mindset of wanting no part in the **community** of the body of Christ because sometimes it just seems too difficult to keep swimming against the tide of the prevailing culture.

And that’s where the function of applause comes in.

Applause functions as **encouragement**. When we notice the good deeds and loving acts of our fellow Christians and applaud them for it, they are **encouraged** to continue. This doesn’t mean that our love and good deeds arise from ourselves and the effect of **cheering** each other on. No, these things come from the Holy Spirit working in our hearts and lives and from our response of gratitude for Jesus’ saving work on our behalf. But when we are discouraged or tired, God uses the means of the body of Christ, fellow believers, to **encourage** us, to remind us that we are a part of something much larger than ourselves – the **community** of the body of Christ.

*How relaxing to sit around the dying embers of a camp fire, mesmerized by the brilliant red glow. Around any campfire anywhere in the world, there is going to be somebody who just can’t resist poking the fire. **Stirring up** those embers crowded together in **community**, as it were, results in wonderful displays of flames and sparks – as if they were **encouraged** to give one last effort at serious burning. But did you ever notice what happens to that ember that rolls off the heap and lies untended to the side, all by itself? Gradually, that brilliant red glow begins to fade and in just minutes, it disappears into the darkness of night – a cold, lifeless lump.*

That is the warning here in Hebrews 10 – to those who have forsaken the **community** of the faith and don’t want to be identified with Christ. The result is to be lost in outer darkness. We are to **encourage** one another as we applaud boldly. Not to bring attention to ourselves, but to honor Christ by living and continuing to live for Jesus.

One thing we all have in common is that we live in **community**. But simply being in **community** isn’t enough. We must **encourage** each other. How can you applaud this week?

Look around you. In your everyday life, is there somebody you need to come alongside and **encourage** with a rousing round of applause? Those of you in positions of authority, you’d be surprised what a word of **encouragement** will do for the morale of those over whom you have authority. Notice what they have done well, especially in the area of expressing love and doing kind things for each other – and applaud. If they have done a job particularly well, encourage them with words that show how good work brings honor to God who designed us for good works. If you see somebody rolling off the heap, lovingly admonish and warn – **encourage** them by noticing them, praying for them and letting them know

Jesus loves them more than they can imagine. And as you do these things in the work place, you'll see **encouragement** spreading out through relationships at work, in traffic on the way home, in their homes and coming right back round to build up the body of Christ, the **community** of believers. **Encouragement** is like that. When somebody has been **encouraged**, they tend to pass it along. And the opposite is true, too. If we DIScourage people with our words, attitude and actions, that discouragement affects the larger family. As we cheer on those God puts in our lives this week, we must applaud boldly with big, **encouraging** palms of praise and laying down costly cloaks of commitment in **community**.

And what about applauding Jesus? No, not clapping for Jesus, but lifting His name up as we interact in community. Giving Him glory in every conversation. Boldly proclaiming Jesus as Lord and King before family and friends – like those palm branch wavers long ago outside the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus, our High Priest, has opened the way for us to enter into the presence of our loving, almighty God. We are invited to **approach** God boldly, **apprehend** eternal hope and **applaud** - to encourage others and to bring honor to Jesus.

You are today dramatically poised between two options. You can join the joyful cries of the redeemed, "Hosanna! Hosanna to the King!" or your wavering, frenzied ways can scream, "Crucify! Crucify Him!"

Jesus, our great High Priest, has opened the way into the presence of Father God. Removing the veil that separated us from God cost Jesus great agony – and death. Will your thoughts, words and actions this week be as palm branches and welcoming cloaks praising your King? Or will they be as thorns pressed into His brow, lashes biting into His back, nails piercing His hands?

Jesus loves us and has prepared the way for us. By the grace that is ours in Christ, let's encourage each other with bold **applause** as we **apprehend** unwaveringly the **hope** that we have to boldly **approach** God. Are you holding fast, apprehending, that HOPE that is ours only by faith in Jesus? The hope that is assurance and confidence in spite of covid, uncertainty, and a culture that is lost? Jesus is the only HOPE that is certain in these uncertain times.