



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
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A Stephen Ministry Congregation
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Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost October 21, 2018

“Draw Near to the Throne with Confidence!”

(Hebrews 4:15-16)

Rev. David K. Groth

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:15-16).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O God, Your divine wisdom sets in order all things in heaven and on earth. Put away from us all things hurtful and give us those things that are beneficial for us; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Sometimes people ask me early in the week what I'm going to preach on Sunday. Usually I'm not sure myself, so my standard answer is "sin." "More specifically, your sin."

Sin: what a dreary little word, right? What a tiny, nasty, musty, ghastly, old-fashioned little word. Sometimes we avoid it and exchange it for something that sounds a little more refined and sophisticated. "Indiscretion" is being used more and more these days, especially by those trying to soft-pedal their sin. Indiscretion sounds like a rare and momentary lapse of judgment rather than our condition in sin, our state of being sinful.

Sin. We avoid the word when we can, and tip toe lightly around it. Many believe that, as a nation, we have lost our sense of sin, and are drifting aimlessly without a moral compass. But I don't believe that. I don't believe we have lost our sense of sin. Not at all.

Sure, we live in a permissive society, a glitzy, cheap, and sensational society. And it sure seems civilization and Christian values are eroding rapidly. Years ago, words we wouldn't even utter in private we now say in public. Values and standards all seem to be falling down around us, from decorum in the White House, to what goes on in our own houses. Some say we are in a crisis of morals and values. We've lost our way; we no longer care about or even know what is right and what is wrong. Our standards are low, and even they are easily transgressed. The bar is barely off the floor, but still it trips us up.

In addition, biblical literacy has never been lower in our country. Most Americans cannot name even five of the ten commandments any more. Many Americans believe Joan of Arc was Noah's wife. I'm not making this up; you can read it for yourself from the Barna Research Group. 50% of graduating high school seniors think that Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife.

So it seems we've lost our way, our sense of wrong, our sense of guilt, our sense of shame. We've lost our sense of sin. So goes the conventional and familiar litany. But I don't believe it. I don't think it's that simple. I rarely encounter anyone with an inadequate doctrine of sin, with the exception of clergy in liberal American protestant churches. But the average person in America, when honestly cataloguing their own sinfulness, could outdo the sternest fire and brimstone preacher any day. I think we know our own flaws and weakness and demons, we know them on more intimate terms than anyone else in the world. As Paul called himself, "Chief of Sinners," each of us could probably do the same because we know our own sin better than any. Therefore sin is not one of those doctrines that needs to be proven. I don't have to argue anyone into a sense of sin. We know wrong when we see it, we know wrong when we hear about it, we know wrong when we do it. So it's not the sense of sin that is missing. What is missing, however, for many, is the certain knowledge of a God who is sympathetic toward us and loves us in spite of our sin.

Many who were brought up as Christians have lost their faith. They've retained their sense of sin without retaining faith in Jesus as Savior from sin. The dilemma for many is they have a perfectly vivid and realistic sense of sin, but no vivid or realistic sense of redemption. Our problem is not ignorance of our sins; our problem is that we know we cannot overcome them, and we are uncertain if it can or has.

But the heart of Christian faith, the good news of the Gospel, is that God not only knows our sin and sympathizes, but can do something about it, and in Christ has done something about it. God has sympathized with our plight as sinners. Contrary to the rantings of many fundamentalist preachers, the Gospel is not about sin. It's about God's sympathy for us and it's about the salvation he's won for us by taking on our plight as his own.

Erik Erikson was a prominent and ground breaking psychologist. He taught at Harvard, UC Berkeley, Yale. Once, among a small group of graduate students, he was

asked, “Are you a Jew?” Erikson replied, “If you are an anti-Semite, then I am a Jew.” That is sympathy. That is entering into the experience of someone else. That’s what Isaiah 53 is all about: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows . . . he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” Christ entered into our experience, and suffered for us.

That is also the point of our text from the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews was written primarily to Jewish Christians who were worried that they should be keeping the Law, including the Jewish ceremonial laws rigidly, in order to be saved. They were being tempted to compromise their Christian faith and blend it with Jewish law-keeping. So the theme of Hebrews is about the absolute sufficiency of Jesus as our Savior from sin. There can be no turning back to the Law for hope of salvation. God’s people must look only to Jesus, whose atoning death and resurrection has opened the way to eternal life.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” He experienced the same temptations that come alluring to us, but remained wholly faithful to the Father. Without compromising the sinless nature of Jesus, this text assures us that Jesus knows our condition. Jesus knows temptation. He knows the temptations to anger, and to power and to adultery and wealth. In short, he knows who we are. In the words of the psalmist, “He knows our frame” (Ps. 103:14). He knows who we are, *not* who we would like to be, or who we pretend to be, or who people think we are. He sees us *as* we are, and yet, he does not turn away.

He knows first-hand not just temptations, but he knows our emotions. He knows how intense they can be, and demanding and controlling they can be. He knows how grief, for instance, can ambush and overwhelm us at unexpected times and in unexpected places.

Think for a moment about your life this past week. Which emotions did you feel? Did you feel any loneliness this last week, any rejection, or confusion, helplessness, guilt, anxiety, disappointment, anger, sadness, jealousy, inadequacy, fear, depression, pain, bitterness, loss, betrayal, abandonment, apathy, distrust, lack of control. Jesus can identify with your sorrows. “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering . . . Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” (Is. 53:3-4). He knows how tangled up we get inside, because he’s been tangled up inside too. He’s able to sympathize.

Makes me think of how many times Scripture says Jesus was moved with compassion for us, not the kind of compassion that people sometimes fake on the outside, but the kind that is a visceral, internal, intestinal response when he sees our sorrows. He knows it all, everything about us and still does not turn away.

When Gail was sick, I was having a hard time keeping up with the house. So I decided to hire a person to give the house a good cleaning, bring it up to a baseline and then, hopefully, I could maintain it from there. The day before he came, however, I spent several hours cleaning, from top to bottom. Why? I couldn’t let him see the house as it was.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus sees us as we are and does not turn away. Instead, he forgives us. That’s it, pure and simple. He sees us as we are and does not turn away.

Most all humanity understands that God sees us as we are, because that’s what God is supposed to do. That’s God’s very nature. He’s omniscient. But to see us as we are and not turn away. . . that’s something different. That’s the Gospel. Not everyone can grasp it. They argue with it, wrestle with it, and often, tragically reject it, concluding it can’t be true, at least not for them. A judgmental and just God is easy enough to understand, but a sympathetic God? A high priest who can identify with you and knows your sin and cares for you and loves you in spite of it? That is an

other-worldly kind of love, a divine love.

In some churches, there's a single, all-seeing eye to be found in the stained glass, kind of like the one on the back of a dollar bill, on top of the pyramid. It's a reminder that God can see all that we try to hide about ourselves from the world. It's the eye that can see us for the frauds that we know we are. Yet our text reminds us that though God sees us, all of us, the real us, yet he loves us in spite of what he sees. That's incredibly good news. It seems implausible, but it's true. We have a Savior, a Friend, a high priest who was tempted as we are, so he knows us as we are, yet still he loves us and intercedes for us. That's what a high priest does for the people; he makes atonement for them.

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” I love those words “with confidence.” Let us with confidence draw near to the throne.

We don't have to try to hide from God in the bushes as did our parents Adam and Eve. We don't have to flee from God, as did Jonah, or as did the psalmist: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” (Ps. 139). We don't have to try to keep God at arm's length, as did Peter. “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.” We don't have to pretend that we're good enough by own merits to be saved. “All these commandments I have kept since childhood” said the rich young man who wanted to save himself. No! We have a God who knows us as we are yet still loves us. That's the one who saved us by laying down his life for us.

“Let us then *with confidence* draw near to the throne of grace.” Not fearfully, or arrogantly, or even meekly, but rather with confidence let us draw near to the throne, confident of his grace, confident of his mercy, confident of his forgiveness.

Confidence. In Luke 21, Jesus gives us some of the signs that will precede His return, and there's some scary stuff in there: distress among the nations, roaring of the sea and waves, people fainting with fear. “Then they will see

the Son of Man coming with power and great glory.” Jesus wraps it up with this: “Now when these things begin to take place, stand up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption is drawing near.” Normally in the Bible, whenever God gives people a peak at his power, they fall on their faces, and try to make a hole and hide in it. But here Jesus says, when you see him coming with *all* his power and might, stand up, lift up your heads . . . with confidence (!) our text says . Your redemption is drawing near.

So, one last time: Jesus knows all and sees all. Jesus loves us despite all that he sees and knows, intervenes for us before the Father as our Great High Priest, having given himself as a sacrifice for our sins. So then let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace. That is the gospel, the good news, the essence of our faith. Thanks be to God. Amen.

