

**Sermon Text:** Hebrews 10:11-25

**Occasion:** 25<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, 14 Nov 2021

### **Made Holy for Holy Places**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> 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. (Heb 10)*

Entering into a holy place can be hard. Not so much in a physical sense because you can walk in, be pushed in a wheelchair, or even be dragged kicking and screaming if necessary. From a spiritual perspective, however, coming into a holy place can be difficult because coming into the presence of holiness makes you confront unholy sins. The author of the book of Hebrews recognizes the difficulty, especially in terms of Old Testament worship. Basically, during the Old Testament period, you could only come into holy places once your sins have been properly forgiven and you have taken part in all the appropriate ceremonies. Even the high priest, the holiest person in the Israelite community, had to be made holy by blood from sacrifices and repent of his sins to enter the holiest of holy places in the temple or else the holiness of God would overcome this holy person and kill him on the spot.

Now, at Hope Lutheran Church, I would be surprised if anyone died on the spot, including dying from unholiness. But this does not mean the holiness of God is not intimidating. God is perfect and pure, entirely good and without defect—we are not. All have sinned (Rom 3:23) and have fallen into unholiness. Therefore, when we enter into a holy place, it is good to recognize our sins, because this shows us the holiness we need to receive from God. For this reason, we begin our worship services with the Confession and Absolution. We recognize our imperfections and our need for God to perfect us in holiness. Only our holy Lord can free us from our sinfulness.

The hard thing for people to grasp sometimes is that God actually wants us to come before Him despite us being sinners. Many people feel intimidated to come to a church because they feel judged or unwelcomed. Some people think there is no way God can forgive them for all that they've done—a belief pondered even by some people who have been attending church their whole lives. But God truly desires all people to come to Him, even the worst of sinners, because it is only where God is present where He makes sinners holy. All of us are imperfect, without exception. All of us were unworthy to come before a holy God. But God calls all of us to faith so that He can make us holy and free us from the sins that weigh us down.

This is the reason God gives us the gift of His word and sacraments. Where God is, there is holiness. And God promises to be where His word and His sacraments are. The words of the Gospel—whether they be heard by the ear or read with the eye—the words of God’s forgiveness forgive you because the Holy Spirit is working through the word of God. It is the same with the sacraments. God has placed them in our midst so that He may make us holy through them. Our sins and iniquities are removed from us when we are washed clean by Holy Baptism, and when we partake of Holy Communion. These things are given to us so God can make us holy and pure.

And since you have already been cleansed by water and the word in Holy Baptism, you can come in full assurance of faith to receive the blessings of God in His presence. You may or may not have noticed it, but in the call to repentance at the beginning this service, I was partially quoting our reading from Hebrews. I called to you, “Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God our Father...” Hebrews 10:22 says, “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.” The assurance we have in our faith is that God will see that we have had our hearts sprinkled clean with the blood of Christ and that we have been washed with the pure water of baptism. It is through baptism that we receive the forgiveness found in Christ’s blood. The water of Holy Baptism is not simply water, the water of baptism is joined by God’s word to the blood of Jesus shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins (1 John 1:7; 5:6-8).

God has made us holy in baptism and we are reminded of this fact when we draw near to confess our sins. At the very beginning of the service, there is the declaration, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This is the word of God in baptism. Even before we make our confession, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit has already washed us in baptism. When you are baptized you are baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit so the Holy Trinity may cleanse you of your sins and make you holy to the Lord.

None of you need to be nervous to come into a holy place because your God has made you holy. You have been cleansed by Holy Baptism which gives to you the forgiveness and life only Christ’s blood can offer. If you ever feel reluctant to come to worship beside your brothers and sisters in Christ, tell yourself, “I am a baptized child of God. I have been washed clean by the Holy Spirit and Christ lives in me. God calls me to receive His gifts in worship alongside my brothers and sisters and I will answer His call.” You may feel ashamed of your sin but the cleansing water, the blood of Christ, and the Holy Spirit are witnessing in your baptism that you have no reason to feel ashamed. You are forgiven. You are Christ’s. You are holy.

Therefore, now live as one whom God has made holy. God has set you apart for His holy purposes, so share His holiness through His word and sacraments. As the author of Hebrews encourages you to do, you should encourage your brothers and sisters to love, to good works for one another, and to come together in worship so that we may assist those who are here. There are many spiritual blessings we receive in worship, not least of which is forgiveness through God’s word and sacrament, but there are also social blessings by coming together as one congregation

here at Hope Lutheran. You are not an isolated individual worshipping God who so happens to be adjacent to other isolated individuals worshipping God. All of us are one body of believers before our Lord sharing in the blessings of His word and sacrament. We are not isolated but united in one holy communion to live as Christ lived, loving those in his Church.

Who among us has sorrows? Who among us has doubts? Who among us is suffering from bodily ills? Although you are made holy in this world, the evils of the world still attack us in body, mind, and spirit. There are many among us who need a helping hand, a sympathetic ear, or a much-desired prayer. You are a baptized child of God, and you should be able to find help from other children of God. We are here to serve our neighbours, especially those we call “brother” or “sister” in the family of the Church. So, who among us has hope? Who among us has good cheer? Who among us has a good back and decent mobility? God has set you aside through the holiness of baptism to love your neighbour through good works, whether this be giving someone rides to Sunday service, listening to a person’s sob story, or offering to pray on behalf of someone. We are encouraged to come together for each other’s blessing.

The greatest blessing of all we have received is a holy life in Jesus Christ our Lord. So, let us live out this holiness by loving one another. It sounds simple, I know, but at times it is difficult. It might mean being confronted by your unwillingness to help others. But you can remind yourself that you are a baptized child of God. You have been washed clean from sin and God calls you to worship the Lord alongside your brothers and sisters in Christ. Do what you can out of love. God has worked the miracle of new life in you through the simple means of water and His word, so sometimes all it takes for God to work a miracle through you is sharing His love with the word.

Love your neighbour as God loves your neighbour. God has prepared you for this purpose. God has made you holy. As you have been prepared to enter God’s holy presence at Hope Lutheran Church, so you have also been prepared to bring His holiness to others. God has called us all here to receive the forgiveness and life of Jesus Christ through word and sacrament. So, let us join together side by side and enjoy these good things, without fear or worry. If you know of any who are not beside us here in the church, encourage them to come. Offer your love by listening to any reason why they may be hesitating to come, and encourage them by pronouncing the holiness they have received in baptism. They, like us, have been washed clean of sin to become holy, and the Lord welcomes us to enjoy it in this holy place. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.