

"Stirring Up, Without Stirring Up"

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

God grant that the best of our time, thoughts, and energy be devoted to God-pleasing things – especially, of course, to that **"one thing needful."** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Typically when we refer to someone or something as "all stirred up" it's not a good thing. Bee hives come to mind, or extremists in the Middle East, or college students taking a break from their study of Zombies in Popular Media 101 (which, by the way, is actually a course offered at Columbia) to protest the download speed of their dorm room servers. In other words, "stirring up" is typically something bad.

But it shouldn't be – not with Christians. In fact the profound *lack* of stirring up among Christians should be recognized as a distinctly *bad* thing and as one of the most difficult challenges we face. The enemies of Christ – in this world and out of this world – absolutely love a society where Christians are passive, lethargic, introverted, and silent. The reason ought to be self-evident and obvious. Christ's Church always declines when his children are silent, complacent, and keep to themselves. Faith, after all, is always a result of exposure to the Word of God, and Christians are the ones who are supposed to be doing the exposing. More than that, faith, once created, is sustained and strengthened only by that Word. The rescue of those caught up in sin is also only addressed and corrected by fellow Christians humbly reaching out to those who are falling away.

It's no wonder then that God the Holy Spirit repeatedly calls on Christians to be stirred up – as he does also in our text for this morning. The text that will guide our study of this general topic this morning is found in the Tenth Chapter of the Book of Hebrews:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 10:19-25** *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² 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. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ 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.

So far the very words of God. These are the words of life. Thank God for them, and for the gift of understanding that he has also given you. That this same God who gave us these words would continue to bless us through their study this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Growing up in the Midwest, I really had almost no exposure to the phenomenon of "revivals" until I moved to the Deep South, where such things are a common occurrence. There you would still today regularly see banners on a variety of churches announcing their upcoming revival. Nor was it all that uncommon to see huge tents erected, often in the middle of nowhere, where these events were taking place. Lutherans don't tend to do much in the way of revivals – for mostly good reasons. Revivals tend to be emotional affairs, and therefore very short-lived. They also tend to be based on human effort which, again, has no staying power. In the end they also, worst of all, tend to focus on behavior modification rather than on law and gospel. In other words, the goal is not so much outreach or mission work as it is emotionally persuading existing Christians to live better lives.

Despite the negatives, the basic idea behind revivals was probably solid. God wants his children stirred up and active. He wants a faith that burns. He wants hearts filled to overflowing with the incredible message of the gospel. When the Christian heart is truly in the right place, the rest tends to take care of itself. Those that are excited about what has been done for and given to them naturally tend to share what they know with those around them.

But the horse has to come first, not the cart. The cart is fruits of faith; the horse is faith itself. This is *always* the way God in his Word presents it.

Take another look at our text for this morning, which does just that. The Book of Hebrews was written primarily to Jews in that it tied the Old Testament to Jesus. In other words, it presented an extraordinary case as to how and why Jesus does not represent that which *conflicts* with the Old Testament but serves as the natural culmination or fulfillment of it. Every word of the Old Testament pointed to the coming of the Messiah promised by God already at the Fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, and Jesus Christ *is* that promised Messiah.

In the verses leading up to our text, for example, the Holy Spirit through the verbally inspired writer focused on the Old Testament sacrifices – some of which were performed daily and some once each year. His point was that those sacrifices were not an end in themselves (which is what they had become for the Jews) but pointed ahead to the one great Sacrifice that God would send when he sent his Son. The theme was a consistent *"Not over and over again, but once, and for all."* The sacrifice that God himself would make was, as we would expect, infinitely better than anything man could do. Man did what he did over and over again because it wasn't the main event – the thing itself. Every one of those sacrifices was just a "preview of *the* coming attraction." The Jews did not pay their sin debt through their sacrifices. Those sacrifices pointed ahead to the debt payment that would be paid by Jesus' crucifixion.

The other great truth established by the Book of Hebrews is the comparison it draws between then and now – pre-Christ compared to post-Christ. While it sounds odd, it is nonetheless true that a payment isn't made until it is made. The promise of repaying a debt isn't the same as actually paying the debt. The Old Testament sacrifices represented God's promise that the debt would be paid. Those who made the sacrifices weren't paying the debt; they were thereby signifying that the debt would be paid at a later date by God himself. They were saved then not by their actions but through their faith or trust in the promise that God alone could keep.

This wasn't just a problem "for those people back then." It's also a very real problem for us today. It is so terrifyingly easy and "natural" for us to fall back into the misguided idea that the fruits of our faith are the things that save us, rather than that gift of faith itself. We feel good when we do the right thing – as we should – but then we have to do battle with the idea that those good things that we have done represent the reason God loves us. The truth is that he loved and saved us first, and any good thing that follows from us is really nothing more than a thank you for what he has already given to us.

And there's another problem we need to confront here, which is our tendency to take for granted our incredibly good fortune to have been born after Christ, after the fulfillment of God's great promise.

In the verses leading up to our text, the Book of Hebrews draws a picture of life prior to Christ – and it was an existence characterized by barriers. It was a time when the law was still our stern, cold, unyielding nanny. God's laws, together with the threats directed toward all who break those laws,

was in charge. The debt, again, had not yet been paid. The righteous demands man owed God for our sins had not been satisfied.

What was life like in that climate, under those circumstances? It was, again, one of fear and barriers. Even those who believed in the promise did not enjoy the access to God that we today enjoy. They heard the voice of God at Mt. Sinai and were terrified. The curtain in the temple served as a constant reminder of the as yet unpaid sin debt that separated man from his God. The Jews did not look at God as their loving Father but as the stern, unyielding God to whom they owed a debt on which they couldn't even make the first or smallest payment. It was, in a sense, a terrifying relationship.

All of that changed the moment the physical life left the body of Jesus Christ. Instantly our relationship with our God was forever altered – in a moment, in the blink of an eye. He died, we were born. His life left, ours arrived. Death was his lot, life was ours. Understand that this was the single most momentous, game-changing event in the history of the human race. Not only was our impossible debt fully and irreversibly paid, our relationship and access to our Creator and Judge was eternally reset – restored to what Adam and Eve enjoyed in the Garden of Eden.

One of the greatest benefits of this restored relationship was *access* – access to God himself. The clearest physical evidence for this momentous change was the tearing of the curtain in the temple that, in a physical way, had signified man's lack of access to his God. No one was permitted to enter the most holy place in the temple. Only the high priest and then only once each year to offer a sacrifice. Man was not worthy because of his sin. All of that changed when Christ offered his life as the fulfillment of all of those countless sacrifices that came before, and pointed to, exactly and only what Jesus did on the cross. The result, again, was a forever changed relationship, including access. When that curtain was torn by the hand of God himself, God's message was clear: *"The barrier that had separated man from me was sin. That barrier is now gone forever, since the penalty for every sin of every human being has been paid in full by my Son. Now you can come to me whenever you want and for whatever reason. Now you can know me as 'Father.'"*

This is the point at which our text takes up the Holy Spirit's own line of reasoning: ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is,***

through his flesh, ²¹ ***and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*** ²² ***let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."***

This access that we now have to God himself is not only a tremendous blessing in and of itself – with innumerable implications for each of us – it also lends insight to other aspects of our faith life. Here's just one example. This is the setting and context of that frequently quoted Bible passage (found also in our text) that is presented more often than not as a command: ***"...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some."*** This is often presented as a command by God not to stop going to church. Only it's not presented as a command here, is it? It's not a push; it's a pull. In other words, it is not here presented in the context of what God commands of us; it is presented in the context of what God has already done. The line of reasoning is this: *"Given this new access that is ours, and given the fact that now, unlike before, the barrier of sin that once separated us from our God has been removed and we can therefore come boldly and confidently into God's presence, why would we ever even consider not joining our fellow Christians in gathering together in God's house on a regular basis?"*

Do you see the problem if this is turned into a command? Then man logically assumes that this is something that *he* still has to do to please God or pay for his own sin. But that's exactly the opposite of what our text is telling us. We are to come not under duress or by compulsion but because we now can.

Our text then tells us something else rather incredible: ***"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."*** Don't miss the truth communicated by these words. The assumption is that we still sin. That's a given. Yet God here tells us that our ***"evil conscience"*** is now a thing of the past. How could this be, since we still sin? Because the guilt of our sin is gone – paid in full by Jesus Christ.

This, in the end, is how and with what our God calls on us here today to ***"stir each other us."*** This sort of stirring up is neither frivolous or simply emotion-based and therefore temporary. This is perhaps the greatest benefit of meeting together as we do – instead of each going his own way "to worship God as he sees fit." Here, we ourselves are stirred by the magnificent promises of God himself, and we in turn share this with our fellow Christians. Here is where we also then learn not to take our neighbor's encouragement and even correction as anything but their

humble, loving concern that none of us lose the gifts we have been given – stirring up the right way and avoiding the animosity and factions that tend to do such damage to Christ's body of believers.

Rejoice then – truly thrill to the gifts you have been given – and don't be intimidated into keeping that joy to yourself. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Daniel 12:1-3** "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

^{ESV} **Mark 13:1-13** And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" ² And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ³ And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵ And Jesus began to say to them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷ And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit. ¹² And brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death. ¹³ And you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Michael McEnroe, President

Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Suzannah Miller

25th Sunday after Pentecost – November 15, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 465 (Red Hymnal)

"Christ Is Our Cornerstone"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson (Daniel 12:1-3) As we approach the end of another church year, it is fitting that we look forward as well as backward. Actually both directions hold promise and comfort for God's children. Looking backwards we see how richly God has blessed us and how faithfully he has cared for us. Looking forward we see even greater things that God has in store for us. What a blessing to be called children of God.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 13:1-13) Because there is such evil in this sin-riddled world, our God continually warns us that although we will be kept under his protection until the very end, we should expect trouble along the way. This is not a testament to God's impotence or carelessness but to the evil of sin, and of those who live in rebellion against their God. Still, God is greater and will preserve us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 412 (Red Hymnal)

"May We Thy Precepts Lord Fulfill"

The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 10:19-25 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Stirring Up, Without Stirring Up"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 604 (Red Hymnal)

"Great God, What do I See and Hear"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -794 (Verses 1 & 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (48) Average (49)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Gethsemane of Spokane has called Pastor Michael Gurath. Their current Pastor, Robert List, continues to recover from his recent bypass surgery.

Christmas Party Sign-up – Both the attendance sheet and the food sign-up sheet for the annual Church Christmas Party are on the mailbox table. Please indicate your intention to attend as soon as possible, as well as which food items you can supply.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet after the fellowship time next Sunday.

Organ Update – We continue to gather information on the best course of action for replacing our current organ. We have been put on notice that our 45-year-old organ is nearing the end of its service, although it is functional for now. This has allowed us to make an informed decision going forward. We have recently received very favorable quotes from Mr. Barry Hay, a former member of St. Luke's of Lemmon who is currently teaching at our CLC school in Markesan, WI. Please direct any questions or comments to the Church Council, which is working closely with our organists on this need.