

Text: Heb. 10: 23-25; 12:1-3

I. N. I.

Sermon #1904

Thanks to You Lord Jesus, for planting Your Gospel in this place, and gathering a Church that continues in Your Word. Drive far from us the indifference and apathy of these latter evil days. Cause our hearts to burn with zeal for the truth of Your Word, and preserve Your doctrine true at this place, that our children after us may still be praising You for all the generations to come. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 76, CPH, p.181)

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

In Christ Jesus, our one and only Perfecter, dear fellow redeemed:

Primarily we are taking this day to look back, but in looking forward we are racing toward the end, the Day of the Lord. Are you ready? Do you have that wedding garment on ready to enter the joy of the everlasting King who has invited you to the marriage feast of His Son? If you are spurning the white robe of righteousness given freely to you on behalf of the person and work of His Son, you should know your filthy rags of unrighteousness are unacceptable. If we are found in such disgusting garments of our own we will be numbered, deservedly so, among those cast out into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth everlastingly.

But in order to be properly dressed we regularly gather here my fellow saints to treasure this holy dress first given to most of us in the washing of our baptisms. This place is our perpetual fitting room. Its refurbishment is intended to keep us ever presentably clothed in the only acceptable garments allowed in heaven. The scenes we find pictured for us in these nine windows serve as mirrors in our fitting room. Everyone of them is a picture of at least one sinner. Yes, I know Jesus is the only one pictured in the last picture in heaven, but remember He was named sinner for you, so that you might be named His righteous one. His wounded hands remind us of this. Adam, Eve, Noah, Moses and the others were equals to you in their sin, but in

Christ, they too were and are now only righteous. Let us always find in our gatherings here that we are **Encouraged by a Great Cloud of Witnesses as the Day Approaches.**

### I

All these believers in the Lord's Christ who have come before us were considered by God to be blameless and righteous, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the One whom the Father would and has sent. We gather here so that we may continue to "hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." We are committed to gathering here regularly for that purpose of "encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

The writer of Hebrews includes between the two parts of our text a chapter recounting the faith and life of some of the Lord's saints, from Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah; from Gideon to David and the prophets. Just as we can recount their sinful lives, we also see them as those who through faith in the promised Christ looked forward to their everlasting home of righteousness in heaven.

The race to that day of judgment was not without hope for them. Christ Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of their faith, enabled them to endure the many temptations and trials we all find in our lives fulfilling our God-given vocations. The Son of Adam/Noah/David, was coming to this life filled with all sorts of misery brought on because of our sin, but He would endure it, willingly. The Son of Mary would endure it because of the joy that was set before Him, the joy of being united with us everlastingly in His Father's house.

### II

We recount here week after week, one divine service after another, how it was that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame". Our reverent modesty rightly does not allow us to picture the full extent of His shame endured for us, nailed to those timbers with all His garments stripped and divided among the crucifiers. However in contrast, our gracious Lord has been covering up our shame from paradise lost to paradise restored. But our Savior was exposed in all our shame, especially when He was made to suffer our everlasting shame and torment of hell.

So "consider Him who endured from sinners such hostility against Himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." Your sins have all been paid for and you are dressed most gloriously in His everlasting righteousness. Yes, everyday you have reason to review your life and confess to your many sins of thought, word and deed. But by His grace at work upon you, you have no reason to

grow weary and fainthearted. He finished the race for you already and made you the victor awaiting the crown of glory to be placed on your head as you are brought safely across the finish line, into paradise regained.

### III

In our Rites 1, 2, and 3 we are reminded as we prepare to gather around the Lord's table for a foretaste of the marriage feast to come, that we raise our voices together not only with the angels and archangels but with the whole company of heaven. We sing together starting now the eternal song of praise, which begins: "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth*". We recognize the great cloud of witnesses in heaven and on earth, who have known and still know the joy of salvation found in Christ Jesus their Savior, your shared Savior.

The Day of His return is fast approaching my fellow redeemed, but we are not waiting alone. There are those who waited before our day and also those who sit and stand right next to us in this blessed place. Look around and you see these saints and sinners all around you. Be encouraged - the hope we all share in the Lord's Christ has never failed, but remains permanent for all time and for all eternity.

How can we but be encouraged by this great cloud of witnesses set before us, around us, above us? The righteousness of that perfect Son of God/Son of Man is the righteousness attributed to all these saints, including you. Let us long to spend time regularly in this place, which our Lord has graciously provided for us. It is here where He dispenses all the gifts we need for everlasting life in Word and Sacrament.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning is now and shall ever be forevermore. Amen.