

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

October 3, 2021

Psalm 128:1–6 (ESV):

1 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,

who walks in his ways!

2 You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.

5 The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!

6 May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!

First Reading: Genesis 2:18–25 (ESV):

18 Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." 19 Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. 21 So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

EPISTLE: Hebrews 2:1–18 (ESV):

Warning Against Neglecting Salvation

2 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The Founder of Salvation

5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6 It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
8 putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, 12 saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

13 And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. 16 For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. 17 Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

THE GOSPEL - Mark 10:2–16 (ESV):

2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He answered them, “**What did Moses command you?**” 4 They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” 5 And Jesus said to them, “**Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7 ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.**”

10 And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 And he said to them, “**Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.**”

Let the Children Come to Me

13 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. **14** But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, **“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15 Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”** **16** And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Sermon 40 – Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost

“Reliant Jesus”

Hebrews 2:1-13

Dear friends,

Hebrews tells us the obvious today, but it is an obvious that we need to remember, because of the temptations and the frustrations that the world throws at us these days. We are always challenged to doubt ourselves, and sometimes we need to, but we are also challenged to doubt our faith. In my experience, doubting God, whether He exists, whether He cares, is part of the struggles of living as a sinner in a sinful world. God understands that you will doubt, but God takes seriously how you doubt, and how you fight those doubts, how you meet them. We're going to talk about all these things in connection with this lesson from Hebrews, with some salve, some healing, for our doubts.

This is the beginning of the Epistle of the Hebrews, and the author to the Hebrews goes about his message in a very strange way. What Hebrews actually says is not that difficult to understand, its not a hard concept, its the *way he says it* that makes it sound as strange as it does. All Hebrews is trying to do is to strengthen your faith in Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Savior. He is proving that Jesus is all of these things, the Old Testament Messiah, the one who was crucified for sins. The letter proves that this crucifixion was enough for God to save us, to forgive us. The letter proves that everything said about Jesus is trustworthy and true, and this is how the author decides to start. So chapter one of Hebrews is all about the fact that Jesus came from God and was God, and this chapter, chapter two, continues that theme and unpacks it. If Jesus came from God, this means something for us Christians who believe that Jesus came from God.

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” That first sentence there is wonderfully

straightforward, and it is one repeated throughout the letter and the other parts of the Scriptures too. We must pay attention to what we hear from God's Word, or we'll drift away. This is absolutely true and you all are here listening to me so good on you, you're doing the thing you need to do so you don't fall away. The strange part comes in verse 2, when he talks about the message declared by angels. What does this mean?

Well, I can think of two different instances that the author is referring to. At the beginning of the Gospels, the angels visit the shepherds at the birth of Jesus, and they sing "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" The angels announced Jesus birth with song, and that announcement was a message. Jesus is here, Jesus is Messiah. So that's one instance of a message declared by angels. The second comes at the end of the story, the end of Jesus' life, when the women are at the tomb and what do they see? They see angels. Those angels give them another message: He is not here, He is Risen, go tell the others. These two messages, together, are what the epistle lesson is talking about. He's saying, look, Jesus was the Son of God, He was the one who won your forgiveness of sins, He was the one who died then rose from the dead. You can believe this because the angels said so, and it came true, and witnesses have seen it and told us. Again, its a simple statement. What did the angels say? Jesus was God, Jesus will save you, Jesus died, and Jesus rose. All those things turned out to be reliable because they actually happened just like the angels said.

Why is this weird? Because of this writer's need to involve the angels at all. I would normally say to you that you can trust the Scriptures, you can trust the Bible, because it is God's own word. The writer to the Hebrews says, you can trust the Scriptures, you can trust the Christian faith, because the message of the angels proved to be reliable. Do you see? It's two different roads to get to the same destination. Not one of you over the years has asked me, Pastor, I'm doubting my faith because I don't know if the angels were reliable. That's kind of silly, but that's the angle that the writer to the Hebrews takes to prove that Jesus was who He said He was, and did what He said He did.

It's not that weird, though. Angels are God's messengers after all, they can be trusted, and when an angel appears in the Bible usually something big is about to happen. The fact that angels appeared to announce Jesus' birth meant that Jesus was a big deal, the fact that angels appeared to announce His resurrection meant that Jesus coming back from the dead was big news for us all. So the writer to the Hebrews reminds us that we can trust all of this. The angels said so, so we can.

“It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, 4 while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” We Christians say some really bizarre sounding things when you really think about it. We say that a Jewish laborer who lived two thousand years ago was also God, and that by getting crucified, two thousand years later, we know that we have forgiveness of sins and all that. That sounds like kookoo talk, that sounds nuts when you put it like that. Why do we say these things? Why do we believe these things? Hebrews tells us. God Himself told us all this. He did through people, but the Bible is His Word, not the word of man. Furthermore, it wasn't just words, it was actions. Miracles. Wonders. Signs. Not just through Jesus, but through the apostles too, think of all those healings and raising people from the dead. All that is why we can trust and believe the things that the Scriptures say. Jesus rose from the dead. I can't think of anyone else who managed that, and so when Jesus says something, I'm inclined to believe Him. The world thinks this is foolish, but it is anything but. The Bible says it happened the way it happened, history suggests it happened that way, the archaeology backs us up, it all points to Jesus being exactly who He said He was.

We all know this, why say it again? Because we live in a world that thinks this is dumb, and that we are extra dumb for believing it. Hebrews speaks to this as well, it just does it in its own special and kind of strange way. **“7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, 8 putting everything in subjection under his feet.”** Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. **9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”** God owns everything, God controls everything, Jesus is God, so everything is in subjection to Jesus. It's cool that Hebrews acknowledges we don't see this, because we don't. We do not see everything in subjection to Jesus, the world just looks like the world, and things that happen just seem like they happen. But we do see Jesus, we see Him through words, we see Him through faith, and we see Him through suffering. And in seeing Jesus we're seeing the world as it truly is, a wretched, sinful place that really needs to go the way of the dodo. We see ourselves for who we truly are, wretched, sinful people that need to be remade, reborn, forgiven.

We see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. How? That seems like a description of heaven, doesn't it? I want to see Jesus crowned with glory and honor. I want to see the end of this thing, I want to go to heaven but I'm stuck here instead. But Hebrews isn't lying, you see Jesus' glory and honor every day. By seeing Him crucified and risen. By hearing those stories, remembering them, and remembering that they are all there for us. Look upon the pictures we have of Jesus the Good Shepherd, leading His people to quiet pastures and still waters. Jesus' honor and glory is serving and saving you. Look upon the pictures of Jesus' crucifixion, that cross that hangs above us. Jesus' honor and glory was to bleed and die so that you wouldn't suffer hell for your sins.

Everything is under God's control, everything is in subjection to Jesus, and Jesus considers His highest priority your salvation. Your welfare is part of that, but the Bible dares us to believe that all these people who tell us all these miraculous and wonderful things aren't lying. How can we know? Because Jesus rose from the dead, and He didn't do it as a chore, He didn't do it with a sigh, rolling His eyes. He did with full determination to save you.

Amen.