

October 1 **Hebrews 8:1-6**

The main point we are saying is this:
We have such a high priest, one who is seated
at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in the heavens,
a minister in the sanctuary
and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up.

Every high priest offers gifts and sacrifices;
hence it is necessary to have something to offer.
If Jesus were on earth, he would not be a priest at all
since they offer gifts according to the law.
They offer worship in a sanctuary
that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one.
When he was about to set up the tent, Moses was warned,
“Make everything according to the pattern
that was shown you on the mountain.”

But Jesus has obtained a more excellent ministry,
and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant,
which has been enacted through better promises.

* How is Jesus a mediator of a better covenant? What are these better promises?

* If Jesus were a priest only according to the law, how might your ministry be different? How is Jesus' ministry priestly? How is his being a priest, offering himself as the sacrifice, central to his ministry and to ours?

We give you thanks, almighty God, who sits on the throne of heaven, that we have Christ as our high priest. May his sacrifice on the cross and our baptism into Christ, empower us as the priesthood of all believers to minister boldly and courageously in his name. Amen.

October 2 **Hebrews 8:7-13**

If the first covenant had been faultless,
there would have been no need to look for a second one.
God finds fault with the people when God says:
“The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah;
not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors,
on the day when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of the land of Egypt.
They did not continue in my covenant,
and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

They shall not teach one another to say to each other,
‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.
I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34)
In speaking of “a new covenant,” God has made the first one obsolete.
And what is obsolete and growing old will soon disappear.

* How is living under the law of the old covenant now obsolete in your life? How is the new covenant written in your mind and on your heart?

Covenant God, you have been merciful. In Christ Jesus, you do not remember our sins. How can we thank you that you have said that you are our God and we are your people? Give us courage to live this new life. Amen.

October 3

Hebrews 9:1-5

Even the first covenant had regulations for worship
and an earthly sanctuary.
A tent was constructed, the first one,
in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence;
this is called the Holy Place.

Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies.
In it stood the golden altar of incense
and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold,
in which there were a golden urn holding the manna,
and Aaron's rod that budded,
and the tablets of the covenant;
above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat.

Of these things we cannot speak now in detail.

- * We *cannot* see in detail these things. How do you picture the worship place of the Hebrew people? What do you think their worship life was like?
- * How do you picture your own worship setting? What are the significant symbols? What is the furniture? Who enters? Who stands where and why? How does your worship space shape how you see God?
- * How do people who come into your place of worship for the first time see it? Have you asked them? How do we explain the symbolic meanings? How do we help them, (and ourselves), stand in awe of the holiness of God and also draw near in confidence of Christ's welcome?

Holy God, we dare not enter your presence, and yet you bid us come. In Christ Jesus, present with us in Word and Sacrament, we experience your holiness, your mercy, your new covenant. Make us your holy people, that we may share your love with the world. In Christ we pray. Amen.

October 4

Hebrews 9:6-10

Such preparation having been made,
the priests go continually into the first tent
to carry out their ritual duties;
but only the high priest goes into the second,
and he but once a year,
and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself
and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people.

By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary
has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing.
This is a symbol of the present time,
during which gifts and sacrifices are offered
that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper,
but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms,
regulations for the body imposed until the time comes
to set things right.

- * When would be the time to set things right? What is needed to really set things right?
- * How do we view the varieties of sin (intentional and unintentional) differently (even so-called "venial" and "mortal" sins) when we know that Christ died for all sinners and for all possible sins, sins of omission as well as sins of commission?
- * How do we approach people in mission who may feel a worship center is too holy for them to enter?

God, who alone we worship, cleanse us from all sin. Keep us from the worship of false gods. Guide us to your holy presence and fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit that we may open the doors of your sanctuaries wide for all to enter. Keep us close to Christ who has set things right for all time. In his name we pray. Amen.

October 5 **Hebrews 9:11-14**

When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come,
then through the greater perfect tent
(not made with hands, that is, not of this creation),
he entered once for all into the Holy Place,
not with the blood of goats and calves,
but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.

If the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer,
sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified,
how much more will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit
offered himself without blemish to God,
purify our conscience from dead works
to worship the living God!

* What kinds of sacrifices do we offer today to false gods? Sacrifice of others?
Self-sacrifice? How much more does the death and resurrection of Christ
transform us from dead works to the worship of the living God?

* Since Christ's sacrifice is once and for all and eternal, how does that shape
our individual lives and our lives in faith communities?

* This extensive comparison with priesthood, and the Holy of Holies, and
sacrifice was necessary, even essential, to relate to the Hebrew people. How
do we share the distinctiveness of Christ through images and metaphors and
examples that relate to people's lives today?

*Christ Jesus, you have become our high priest through becoming the sacrifice
for our sins. Purify our consciences. Make us alive to the power of the Spirit.
Work through us so that many may be freed from death for life with you.
Amen.*

October 6 **Hebrews 9:15-22**

Christ is the mediator of a new covenant so that those who are called
may receive the promised eternal inheritance.
This is in effect because there has been a death that sets people free
from the wrongs they did while the first covenant was in effect.

In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the one who made it has died.
A will is not in effect as long as the one who made it is alive.
Hence the first covenant went into effect only with blood.
When every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses
in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats,
with water and scarlet wool and hyssop,
and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying,
"This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you."

In the same way he sprinkled the tent and all the worship vessels with blood.
Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood,
and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

* How do the words from Hebrews 9:20 resonate with Exodus 24:8? How do
we hear them now at the Eucharistic table? (Matthew 26: 27-28; Mark 14:23-
25; Luke 22:20)

* At the time of a death, or at a funeral, or the reading of a will, people offer
all sorts of explanations, e.g. "God wanted another angel in heaven," "All
things work together for good." How are such words often more hurtful than
helpful? What can we say about Christ's death that will truly set people free?

*Christ Jesus, we have been joined with you in your death and resurrection.
May we who are privileged to gather at your altar now, be transformed by the
power of your spirit to indeed be the body of Christ in the world. Amen.*

October 7 **Hebrews 9:23-28**

The things that were sketches of the heavenly things
had to be purified with rites,
but the heavenly things themselves require better sacrifices.
For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands,
a mere copy of the true one, but entered into heaven itself,
now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Nor was it to offer himself again and again,
as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year
with blood that is not his own;
for then he would have had to suffer again and again
since the creation of the world.

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age
to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself.
Just as it is appointed for mortals to die once,
and after that the judgment,
so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many,
will appear a second time, not to deal with sin,
but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

* Why is it that we sin again and again? How do human sins not only add up,
but multiply to create such complex knots of systemic sin?

* What comfort is it to you that Christ's sacrifice was once and for all?

* How do you imagine Christ's second coming? What difference does it make
that Christ comes not to have to deal with sin again, but for all who are eagerly
waiting for him?

*Christ Jesus, you are not simply a facsimile, but our real Lord and Savior. We
thank God that our sin has been removed. Use us to testify to your saving work
that all might live in the freeing good news that sin has lost its power. In
Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

October 8 **Hebrews 10:1-10**

Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come
and not the true form of these realities,
it can never, by the sacrifices continually offered year after year,
make perfect those who approach.

* If sacrifices to the law would have sufficed, would they not have ceased
being offered, since the worshipers, cleansed once for all, would no longer
have any consciousness of sin?

But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year.
It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure.
Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure
in sacrifices and offering, burnt offerings, and sin offerings
(these are offered according to the law), then he added,
“See, I have come to do your will.”
He abolishes the first in order to establish the second.

* What about the law has been abolished? Since sin offerings are no longer
necessary, how does our new life in Christ change our relationship to the law?

*We give you thanks to you, O God, that it is by your will that we have been
sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. In his
name we pray. Amen.*

October 9 **Hebrews 10:11-18**

Every priest stands day after day at his service,
offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.
But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins,
“he sat down at the right hand of God,”
and since then has been waiting
“until his enemies would be made a footstool at his feet.” (Ps. 110:1)
By his single offering he has perfected for all time
those who are sanctified.

* What is the potential for life for Christians and the church since we need not make sacrifices over and over? Why, then, do we often merely “stand there day after day”?

The Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,
“This is the covenant that I will make with them
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds,”
and also adds,
“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.” (Jer. 31:33-34)
Where there is forgiveness of these,
there is no longer any offering for sin.

* What is the power of forgiveness in your life and in the life of the church?

O God, you have put your laws in our hearts and written them on our minds. You remember our sins no more. Cleanse us and make us holy so that our new life in Christ may be a testimony to the work of the Spirit. In Christ we pray. Amen.

October 10 **Hebrews 10:19-25**

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary
by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way
that he opened for us through the curtain (his flesh)
and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
let us approach 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.

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering,
for the One who has promised is faithful.

Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,
not neglecting to meet together; as is the habit of some,
but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

* How can we, as brothers and sisters in the faith, strengthen one another when the faith of one is wavering? How can we be faithful to one another?

* Think of some ways that you can provoke one another! How, by the power of the Spirit, do we call forth love and good deeds from one another? How can we provoke one another to works of justice and peace-making?

* When one is absent from the church, all are diminished. How can we, as people called to be part of a congregation, not neglect one another, but encourage each other in faithfulness and full participation?

May we who have been baptized approach you, O Most Holy God, with full assurance of faith. Wash us clean; keep us in the new and living way in Christ. Bind us together so that in our worship, work, and witness we grow in love and service in Christ, Amen.

October 11 **Hebrews 10:26- 31**

If we willfully persist in sin
after having received the knowledge of the truth,
there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,
but a fearful prospect of judgment,
and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

* How can Christ's sacrifice for sin no longer remain? What are the ramifications of willfully persisting in sin?

Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy
"on the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Deut. 17:6)

* How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved
by those who have spurned the Son of God,
profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified,
and outraged the Spirit of grace?

For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."
And again, "The Lord will judge the people." (Deut. 32:35-36)

* "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," may be a quote used too often about God.
Or, do you think it is not used enough? What does it mean? To the world? To
the church? To you?

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Lord, preserve us. Amen.

October 12 **Hebrews 10:32-39**

Recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened,
you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,
sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution,
and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

* When have you endured a hard struggle? What have you suffered? When
were you a partner with someone who was being abused and persecuted?

You had compassion for those who were in prison,
and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions,
knowing that you possessed something better and more lasting.

* When, by one means or another, were your possessions plundered? When
did you have compassion for those who were in prison?

Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours;
it brings a great reward.

You need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God,
you may receive what was promised.

For yet "in a very little while, the one who is coming
will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one will live by faith.

My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back." (Hab. 2:3-4)
But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost,
but among those who have faith and so are saved.

* Confidence. Endurance. When did you shrink back from your faith? By
what power and with whose help have you regained confidence and
endurance?

*May we not shrink back, O God, from the faith which you have grown in us by
the power of your Spirit. May we not abandon our faith, but endure. May we
have the confidence to hold fast no matter what the struggle or the loss. May
we have compassion and strength to stand by those in need that all may
endure in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

October 13

Hebrews 11:1-3

Now faith is the assurance
of things hoped for,
the conviction of things not seen.

- * How is “hope” as assurance of God keeping God’s promises different from the “I hope” of everyday conversation?
- * What is “faith” for a Christian? Is it a doctrine? Is it a feeling? Is it living? Is it static? Is it a verb, in so far as the nature of our believing changes as we grow and develop? How is it “assurance”?
- * How can we hold as a conviction that which we have not seen? How is faith the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen?

Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

By faith we understand
that the worlds were prepared
by the word of God,
so that what is seen was made
from things that are not visible.

- * How is faith the key to our understanding the unfathomable nature of the Creator of the universe? How does faith free us from having to defend the particular way and time that God creates?
- * What is the Word of God? How is it central to our faith in Jesus Christ as well as in our Creator God?

God of the universe, your Word is sure. Your promises are true. May we who have been approved and set free in the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus continue to grow in faith, assured of your unconditional love. In Christ we pray, Amen.

October 14

Hebrews 11:4-7

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain’s. Through this he received approval as righteous, God giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks.

- * Read the Genesis 3:4-10 account, (or the more full account, 3:1-16) of Abel’s sacrifice. What are the complexities of that story? How is it used here in Hebrews?

By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and “he was not found, because God had taken him.” It was attested before he was taken away that “he had pleased God.”

- * Read Genesis 5:21-24 (or all of chapter 5). Enoch “walked with God” or “spent his life in fellowship with God.” How is that important in this Hebrews text?

Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach God must believe that God exists and that God rewards those who seek God.

By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this, he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.

- * Read Genesis 6:13-22 (or all of Genesis 6-8). How is this significant for faith?

O God, we do believe that you exist. We count it an honor that we may approach you. Strengthen us when our faith is weak that we may seek you without end. In Christ, Amen.

October 15 **Hebrews 11:8-16**

By faith Abraham obeyed and set out, not knowing where he was going.
By faith he stayed in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land,
living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him in the promise.
He looked forward to the city whose architect and builder is God.
By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was old,
and Sarah herself was barren,
because he considered the One faithful who had promised.
Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead,
descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and innumerable
as grains of sand by the seashore.”

All of these died in faith without having received the promises,
but from a distance they saw and greeted them.
They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth,
for people who speak in this way make it clear
that they are seeking a homeland.
If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind,
they would have had opportunity to return.
But as it is, they desire a better country, a heavenly one.
Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God;
indeed, God has prepared a city for them.

* How is the story of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12-25:11) foundational to the faith of Jewish and Christian people? How is Abraham remembered in Hebrews?

* What difference does it make in our life story to have faith built on the promises of God?

O God, who is not ashamed to call yourself our God, we treasure being your people. May we base our lives on the foundations of your promises. Give us the courage to follow your call. We walk by faith. In Christ, Amen.

October 16 **Hebrews 11:17-22**

By faith Abraham, when put to the test,
offered up Isaac.
He who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son,
of whom he had been told,
“It is through Isaac that the descendants shall be named for you.”
He considered the fact that God is able even
to raise someone from the dead—
and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

* Read Genesis 22:1-14. How do you comprehend this unimaginable command of God?

* How do you comprehend the unimaginable act of God in giving the Son, Jesus Christ, to live and die for us? What place does the Good News of the dead being raised have in your life?

By faith Isaac invoked blessings for the future on Jacob and Esau.
By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph,
“bowing in worship over the top of his staff.”
By faith Joseph, at the end of his life,
made mention of the exodus of the Israelites
and gave instructions about his burial.

* Read Genesis 27:27-40; Genesis 47:31; Gen. 48 and 50:24-25. In these familiar stories, what are the foundations of faith for the Hebrew Christians and for us?

By faith, you led your people through incredible times and blessed them. Bless us, too, God, that we may trust you in the midst of journeys of faith. May we return again and again to Christ's great love for us that we may venture in his name. Amen.

October 17 Hebrews 11:23-31

By faith Moses was hidden by his parents after his birth
because they saw that the child was beautiful;
and were not afraid of the king's edict.
By faith Moses, when grown, refused to be called a son of Pharaoh's daughter,
choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God
than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.
He considered abuse suffered for the Christ to be greater wealth
than the treasures of Egypt; he was looking ahead to the reward.
By faith he left Egypt unafraid of the king's anger;
he persevered as though he saw him who is invisible.
By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood,
so that the destroyer of the first born
would not touch the first born of Israel.
By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land,
but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they drowned.
By faith the walls of Jericho fell after seven days.
By faith Rahab did not perish with those who were disobedient,
because she had received the spies in peace.

* Read Exodus 2:1-5:13 and 12:1-15:21 (or all of Ex. 2-16) with "by faith" in front of each section. How does this shape the story? What parts of the Exodus account would you lift up as related to your faith in God's faithfulness? Your faith in Christ?

* Read Joshua 6:12-21 (or all of the Book of Joshua). Read Joshua 6:22-25 (also Joshua 2:1-21). What do you see in these stories that makes you ponder what faith is all about?

Throughout salvation history, O God, you again and again help your people in the midst of danger, challenged them on their journey and called them to renewed relationship with you. Help us, challenge us, and call us as we, by the power of the Spirit, grow in faith in Christ, Amen.

October 18 Hebrews 11:32-40

What more should I say?
Time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,
of David and Samuel and the prophets—
who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice,
obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched raging fire,
escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness,
became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.
Women received their dead by resurrection.
Others were tortured, refusing to accept release
in order to obtain a better resurrection.
Others suffered mocking and flogging, even chains and imprisonment.
They were stoned to death, sawn in two and killed by the sword;
they went about in skins of sheep and goats,
destitute, persecuted, tormented—
of whom the world was not worthy.
They wandered in deserts and mountains,
and in caves and holes in the ground.
Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith,
did not receive what was promised,
since God had provided something better so that they would not,
apart from us, be made perfect.

* Why is this passage significant for the Hebrews and for us in linking the people of the first covenant with the new covenant?

* Consider the faithful who suffered unimaginable things in the 2000 years since the birth of the church. Who suffers yet today? How are we joined together in the suffering of Christ and in the promise?

What more can we say, God of our forbears? Your promises are sure. Our lives are secure in your hands. Keep us, in the midst of our own sufferings, close to Christ. Amen.

October 19 Hebrews 12:1-6

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely,
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,
looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,
who for the sake of joy that was set before him endured the cross,
disregarding its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,
so that you may not grow weary or lose heart,
In your struggle against sin
you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

You have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—
“My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
or lose heart when you are punished by God;
for the Lord disciplines those whom God loves,
and chastises every child whom God accepts.” (Prov. 3: 11-12)

* Hebrews 12:5-6, along with Job and Proverbs, often have been quoted to justify abusive punishment of children. How is, “I’m doing this for your own good,” a misuse of this passage? How else have you heard it misused? What can this say about God’s deep love and concern for us? And about discipline?

* When verses 5-6 are read together with 3-4, how do they shed light on one another? How do the promises of 5-6 sustain us when we are tempted to lose heart in struggle?

Verses 1-2 are worth committing to memory. Pray them: Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings too closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Amen.

October 20 Hebrews 12: 7-13

Endure trials for the sake of discipline.
God is treating you as children;
for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?
If you do not have the discipline in which all children share,
then you are illegitimate and not God’s children.
Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us,
and we respected them.
Should we not be even more willing to be subject
to the Father of spirits and live?
They disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them,
but God disciplines us for our good, to share God’s holiness.
Now discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time,
but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness
to those who have been trained by it.

* Here discipline is used in the best possible light. Recall your own discipline as a child. What painful memories do you have? What peaceful fruit has come from it?

* In what ways has your growth in discipleship included healthy disciplines?

Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,
and make straight paths for your feet,
so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but healed.

* Use these two verses to physically adopt a posture of prayer and praise that is appropriate to your own body. These verses are worth committing to memory, too.

Strengthen my weak knees, O God. Lift my drooping hands. Heal what is lame. Make straight paths for my feet. Each day shape my life around Christ Jesus, my Lord. Amen.

October 21 Hebrews 12:14-24

Pursue peace with everyone,
and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.
See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;
that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble.
See to it that no one becomes like Esau, immoral and godless,
who sold his birthright for a single meal.
Later, wanting to inherit the blessing, he was rejected,
for he found no chance to repent,
even though he sought the blessing with tears.

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire,
darkness, gloom, a tempest, the sound of a trumpet,
a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken.
(For they could not endure the order that was given:
“If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death.”
So terrifying was that sight that Moses said, I tremble with fear.”)

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God,
the heavenly Jerusalem and to innumerable angels in joyful gathering,
and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous
and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood
that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

* Ponder the phrase, “He found no chance to repent though he sought the blessing with tears.” Reflect on the story of Esau. Reflect on your own.

* Contrast the two scenes of fear and joy. Picture your own reality of relationship with God. Focus on Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. What do you see?

We seek your blessing, most Holy God. May we pursue peace with everyone so that no one fails to obtain the grace of God. In the name of Christ, the Mediator. Amen.

October 22 Hebrews 12:25-29

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking;
for if they did not escape when they refused the one
who warned them on earth,
how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!

At that time God’s voice shook the earth;
but now God has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth
but also the heavens.”

This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—
that is, created things—
so that what cannot be shaken may remain.
Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken,
let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship
with reverence and awe;
for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

* “Our God is a consuming fire.” By themselves, those words fill us with fear. How are they read in context? How *do* we approach God with reverence and awe?

* What is an acceptable worship? How might we come to worship in confidence without taking God for granted?

* What things have shaken your own world? What forces continue to shake our shared earth? In the face of these forces, what does it mean to you to have an unshakable God?

Most powerful God, you have not refused us, your created ones. By the power of your Holy Spirit may we never refuse you. We give thanks that we have received in Christ Jesus a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We await your coming with awe. In the name of the Risen Christ we pray. Amen.

October 23 Hebrews 13: 1-6

Let mutual love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Remember those who are in prison,
as though you were in prison with them;
those who are being tortured,
as though you yourselves were being tortured.

* What stranger have you welcomed? Did you see God's angel in the encounter? Who has welcomed you? How is God continuing to create mutual love among you?

* How does remembering those in prison, as though we were in prison, change the way we think about imprisonment? (Some of us reading this today are in prison.) Likewise in what way does thinking about torture from the perspective of those being tortured call forth our empathy and our action?

Let marriage be held in honor by all,
and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled;
for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

Keep your lives free from the love of money,
and be content with what you have; for God has said,
"I will never leave you or forsake you." (Josh. 1:5)
You can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" (Ps. 118:6)

* How does opportunity and lack of considering the consequences lead us into unfaithfulness? How can we honor our own and others' marriages?

* What are your fears in relation to money? Your fears about security? How can confidence in God's unfailing presence and help lead to contentment?

We live in your love, caring and faithful God. May we grow in our love for each other, unafraid, confident and empathetic. In Christ Jesus. Amen.

October 24 Hebrews 13:7-16

Remember your leaders,
those who spoke the word of God to you;
consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith
Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever.
Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings;
for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace,
not by obeying regulations about food, which have had no benefit.
The priests in the Jewish worship place have no right to sacrifice on our altar.
The bodies of those sacrificed animals were burned outside the camp.

Jesus also suffered outside the city gate
in order to sanctify the people by his own blood.
Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.
For here we have no lasting city,
but we are looking for the city that is to come.
Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God,
the fruit of lips that confess God's name.
Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have,
for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

* We are called to go outside the camp. What is our mission there? Christ is already on the other side of any walls we might erect.

* How does being saved from all sin and oppression and bondage through the sacrifice of Christ alone, free us to sacrificially share what we have? What would that be?

Since Christ suffered outside the city gate, lead us out into the world, confident in the faith we are called to speak and live. Give us hearts strengthened by grace to care for any and all we meet there. In the name of Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever. Amen.

October 25

Hebrews 13:17-25

Obey your leaders and submit to them,
for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account.
Let them do this with joy and not with sighing,
which would be harmful to you.

* Are we hesitant to use the words, “obey” and “submit” in relation to leadership? What words would you use? What is the call to leadership to “watch over souls” and to “give an account”?

* Have we not heard someone (perhaps ourselves), give a sigh of exasperation, or fatigue, or dismissal in thinking or speaking about those they are called to love and to lead? Pray for a joyful spirit in the midst of challenging service.

Pray for us; we are sure that we have a clear conscience,
desiring to act honorably in all things.
I urge you all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you very soon.

Now may the God of peace, who bought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do God's will, working among us that which is pleasing in God's sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, bear with my word of exhortation,
for I have written to you briefly.
I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been set free;
and if he comes in time, he will be with me when I see you.
Greet all your leaders and all the saints.
Those from Italy send your greetings.
Grace be with all of you.

October 26

James 1:1-8

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings.

My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind,
consider it nothing but joy,
because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance;
and let endurance have its full effect,
so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.

* When in the very midst of trials, how in the world can you—and why in the world would you—consider it nothing but joy? What kinds of endurance have trials produced in you? How has this contributed to your maturity?

If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God,
who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly,
and it will be given you.
Ask in faith, never doubting,
for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea,
driven and tossed by the wind;
for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way,
must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

* Surely we doubt. However, ongoing doubt does shake us and confuse us in being of two minds. Image yourself like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. What other images do you have of doubt?

* Have you asked for wisdom lately? What wisdom do you need?

Generous and ungrudging God, give us wisdom. Wash away our doubt. Steady us in the wind. Keep us close to Christ who is our wisdom, our rock, and in whose name we pray. Amen.

October 27 **James 1:9-16**

Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up,
and the rich in being brought low,
because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field.
The sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field;
its flower falls, and its beauty perishes.
It is the same way with the rich:
in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away.

* How can one boast in being brought low? What does that mean? What does that mean in your life? Think of examples of those who give thanks to God for being raised up.

Blessed is anyone who endures temptation.
Such a one has stood the test and will receive the crown of life
that the Lord has promised to those who love him.
No one, when tempted, should say,
“I am being tempted by God”;
for God cannot be tempted by evil and God tempts no one.

One is tempted by one’s own desire,
being lured and enticed by it;
then, when that desire has conceived,
it gives birth to sin, and that sin,
when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.
Do not be deceived, my beloved.

* Because God cannot be tempted by evil, how can God be a strength to us in the midst of temptation? Where and when have our own desires enticed us? To what have they led us?

God, we know you tempt no one. Forgive us our self-justification in blaming you for our own sin. Rescue us from deceiving ourselves. Root us in Christ whose beauty never perishes. Conceive, birth and grow in us love and mercy and service in Christ. Amen.

October 28 **James 1:17-21**

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above,
coming down from the God of light,
with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.
In fulfillment of God’s own purpose
God gave us birth by the word of truth,
so that we would become a kind of first fruits of God’s creatures.

You must understand this, my beloved:
let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;
for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.
Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank wickedness,
and welcome with meekness the implanted word
that has the power to save your souls.

* Since it is by pure grace that we have life by the word of truth in Jesus Christ, how does this generosity transform your own life? How is your life a fruit-bearing life? And how do these images affect the way you think of your discipleship and the work you do?

* Ponder God as the source of all light. What shadows are there in your life? What variations due to change? What deep darkness? Reflect on God’s light in these places.

* Do you wear your anger on the outside or on the inside? What does your particular form of anger produce? In contrast, what power does the implanted word of God in Christ have in you and through you?

God of truth, light and righteousness, may we be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. Give us your wisdom to carry out your mission of salvation in Christ. Amen.

October 29
James 1:22-27

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.
If any are hearers of the word and not doers,
they are like those who look at themselves and, on going away,
immediately forget what they were like.
But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty,
and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—
they will be blessed in their doing.

* Go to a mirror. Look at yourself and see there a child of God, a forgiven person, a disciple of Christ. Remember your baptism. As you go through the day, can you remember the Christ-person you saw there? As a freed person, to what actions will you be called? Look in the mirror again this night, and give thanks.

If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues
but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.
Religion that is pure and undefiled before God is this:
to care for orphans and widows in their distress,
and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

* Just what would it mean to bridle your tongue? And yet we are called to speak and act. In a particular situation, how do we know the difference? What criteria do you use?

* How do you keep yourself from the stains of the world? And, at the same time, how do you involve yourself in the world in works of mercy and acts of justice? Specifically?

God, you have revealed yourself to us in Jesus Christ. May we be steeped in your Word. Encourage us, embolden us, empower us to be doers of the Word, in Christ. Amen.

October 30
James 2:1-7

My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?
If a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into our assembly, and if a person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, “Have a seat here please,” while to the one who is poor you say, “Stand there,” or, “Sit at my feet,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters,

* Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that God has promised to those who love God?

But you have dishonored the poor.

* Is it not the rich who oppress you?
Is it not they who drag you into court?

They are the ones who speak evil of that good name which has been given to you.

* What are some of the acts of favoritism, even subtle favoritism, in which we engage? What are the belief systems undergirding those actions? Do we really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? What is the power of such belief to change our attitudes and actions?

God whose unconditional love in Christ Jesus goes beyond all bias and prejudice, open our hearts to embrace all of your created ones. Make room in our sanctuaries, in our homes, and in our lives for Christ Jesus in the personhood of those whom we might exclude. In his name we pray. Amen.

October 31

James 2:8-13

You do well if you really fulfill the royal law
according to the scripture,
“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
But if you show partiality, you commit sin
and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point
has become accountable for all of it.
For the one who said, “You shall not commit adultery,”
also said, “You shall not murder.”
If you do not commit adultery but if you murder,
you have become a transgressor of the law.

* And what if you have not committed murder but have committed adultery?
Or what if you have not killed but have hurt some one? Or what if you have
not stolen, but have not helped your neighbors protect their property?
How is showing partiality sinful?

* We as sinful human beings often make comparisons in our favor so as to
excuse ourselves and judge our neighbor. When have you done this recently?
How are the words “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has
become accountable for all of it” actually helpful?

So speak and so act as those who are
to be judged by the law of liberty.
Judgment will be without mercy
to anyone who has shown no mercy;
mercy triumphs over judgment.

* What is the law of liberty? How does being free from God’s judgment
through the forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus liberate us to love our neighbor
beyond mere measurement of sins? How has mercy triumphed over judgment?
How is this the heart of being a reforming and transforming church?

Christ Jesus, free us to love our neighbors all over the world. Amen.