

Sunday 11 October 2020

Encourage One Another

Hebrews 10:25 Encourage one another

Lord of all,
help us to come to you now not just as an outward gesture,
but in heart and mind and soul.
Help us to make space in our hectic lives
to be still in your presence,
and so may we live in you and you in us.
Accept us now as we come to you,
and use us for your kingdom.

As I come into God's presence, I choose to praise him in the words of Psalm 93:1f

- ¹ The LORD is king, he is robed in majesty;
the LORD is robed, he is girded with strength.
He has established the world; it shall never be moved;
- ² your throne is established from of old;
you are from everlasting.

When the unknown preacher wrote their extended sermon to the gathered community we know simply as the Hebrews, they were at pains to give a firm theological basis for the instructions they gave as they sought to help the fellowship face spiritual fatigue. There are many 'therefores' in this sermon, and in chapter 10 we find the second of our 'one anotherings', the call to encourage one another.

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 (that is, through 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 he who has promised is faithful. And 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. (Hebrews 10:19–25 See also 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; Hebrews 3:13)

This Hebrew fellowship is suffering waning zeal and a noticeable decline in attendance. We do not know exactly why this is so. It could well be persecution, but there might be other reasons. Perhaps those attending face public ridicule. Maybe there is a tendency to individualism. Might it be that nothing significant is being said or done? Perhaps this church has allowed itself to be defined by its opposition and not by God's gracious act in Christ. All or any of these things can produce lethargy.

The preacher's response is, however, clear - a lesson in applied theology! Our security rests on the finished work of Jesus, our 'great priest' (21). He has made it possible to confidently come to God by opening the way, by drawing back a curtain, as it were. Since we have this confidence let us make use of it. The preacher makes three points here: since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary:

- Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of *faith* (22). Approaching God would be a fearful thing if it were not for the assurance of faith. Now we can come not only in fearful worship, but also in joyful expectation of receiving mercy (4:16) and a hearing from one who understands us and now lives to make intercession for us (7:25)
- Let us hold fast to the confession of our *hope* without wavering (23). There is a need to 'hang on in there'. Life, and particularly the Christian life, can get rough. There are many enemies yet to be finally overcome (10:13), but in the end our confidence is not based on our strength to hold on, but on the faithfulness of the one who has promised to never leave us or forsake us (13:5).
- Let us consider how to provoke one another to *love* (24). The Greek word for provoke can also be translated 'pester', that is, an ongoing action to bring about the desired result. There is a strong element of being in this together and continually supporting one another. So, the first of the two examples the preacher gives of this provocation is about meeting together. The second example is simply to 'encourage one another', something that can only be done as we maintain fellowship.

The preacher concludes this short section with a reminder of the urgency of the task before us. As Paul puts it, "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." (Romans 13:11) Whatever your beliefs about the details of God's plans for the end of all things, one thing is certain, today they are closer than they were yesterday. As the days pass and the time draws closer, the need to encourage one another in faith, hope and love grows ever stronger.

We pause and pray, asking God to show us how, and who, we might encourage today.

Pause and pray

Gracious God,
take our faith, flawed though it is,
our love, poor though it may be,
and our commitment, for all its imperfections,
and use us in your service
to make known your gracious purpose,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.