

"Invited by God"

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:

All of you have, I'm sure, been invited to a variety of functions and have received those invitations with mixed emotions. We're talking about events like birthday parties, weddings, family get-togethers, dinner parties – things like that. Assuming you went, why? Why did you accept the invitations that you did? Probably for a wide variety of reasons. Maybe you didn't really feel like going, but because of who invited you (like your boss) you felt you couldn't refuse. Maybe it was the sort of function that would advance your career or you had some other ulterior motive. Maybe you were invited to do something you love, so you were excited to go, or you enjoy spending time with others you knew would be there. Or maybe you weren't thrilled with the event, but you went in support of others. Maybe, like many of us, you just went for the free food.

So why exactly are you here this morning? Because you really didn't *want* to come, but you felt obligated or pressured? Because you recognized the invitation as coming from God himself, and you were uncomfortable refusing his invitation? Are you here not necessarily for yourself but in support of others? There's not really a wrong answer here, in the sense that your *honest* answer is, for you, the right answer. Your honest answer, however, may reveal an attitude or expectation that needs attention.

Our text for this morning teaches us something about God's attitude toward joint worship services. He doesn't here command attendance, he invites. That, in itself, is a sobering thought: God himself has invited me to come to his house. This morning we will examine this invitation, together with the background and benefits of it. 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 – or at least they were 26 years ago. There you would 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 – and human emotion typically has the life-expectancy of a fruit fly.

Despite the negatives, the basic idea behind revivals was probably solid. God wants active children. He wants a faith that burns brightly. 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 (or good works). 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, God the Holy Spirit focuses on the Old Testament sacrifices – some of which were performed daily and some once each year. The 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 of the Book of Hebrews is 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 – it wasn't 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' with his sacrificial death on the cross.

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 God's payment, which is ours through faith. 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, or why he forgives us. The truth is that he loved, forgave, 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 law, 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 same relationship with 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 mankind's relationship with our God was forever altered – in a moment, in the blink of an eye. He died, and the debt for all mankind's sins was paid in full. His life left, ours arrived. Death was his lot, life was ours. Understand that this was the single most momentous, world-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 previously 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 a new and amazing 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. Consider one example revealed in our text. 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 to go 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* us to do; it is presented in the context of what God has already done. It is not law, it is gospel invitation. 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 to 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 – *because our God has invited us.*

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.

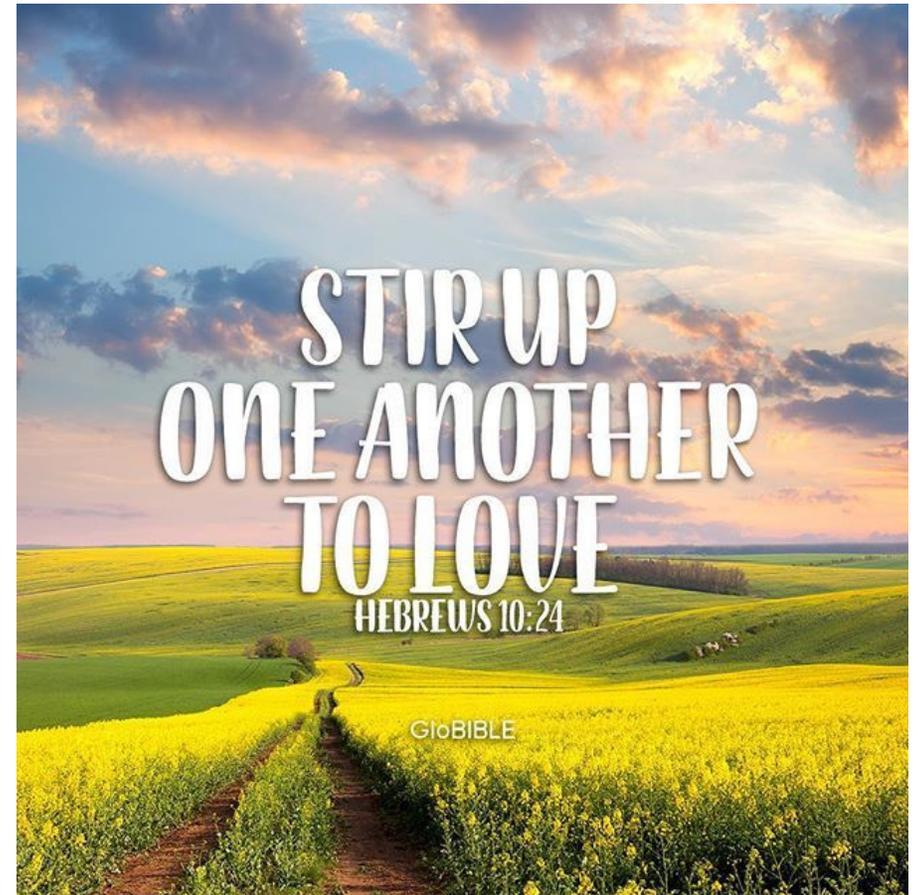
This, in the end, is how and with what our God calls on us in our text to **"stir each other up."** This sort of encouragement is neither frivolous nor simply emotion-based and therefore temporary. This is perhaps the greatest benefit of accepting God's invitation to meet with him – *together* – as we do. Here we worship our God, of course, but here we ourselves are also built up by the magnificent promises of God himself, and we in turn share this with our fellow Christians. We all need to be encouraged, as we all need to be corrected. Here is where we build up and are built up. Here is where we correct and are corrected. Here is where we show our humble, loving concern for others, and they for us, to the end that none of us lose the gifts we have been given.

God himself has invited his children to his house, where he himself has promised to bless us – through his Word and through each other. Never take this gift or his invitation for granted. Amen.

^{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.

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The 25th Sunday after Pentecost – November 14, 2021

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. Both directions hold promise and comfort for God's children. Looking back 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, especially when life in this present existence grows ever more evil – as God himself has told us it would. God can be trusted to protect his children.

Psalm 62 (*See screens*)

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 not expect a trouble-free existence. 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, the One who is for us is greater than those who are against us, and he can be trusted to preserve us.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 604 (*Red Hymnal*)
"Great God, What do I See and Hear"

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

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 329 (*Stanzas 1 & 5*) (*Red Hymnal*)
"From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (*Brown Hymnal page 17*)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (*Brown Hymnal page 20*)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 794 (*Stanzas 1 & 4*) (*Brown Hymnal*)
"Jerusalem, Jerusalem"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (31) Average (30)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday school and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Women's Fellowship Meeting
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 Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
	-11:15 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to Faith Lutheran of St. Louis. Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie.

Women's Fellowship – The Women's Fellowship is scheduled to meet briefly during the fellowship hour this morning to organize the annual Church Christmas party.

Church Council – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour. Please forward agenda items to President Mark Johnson.