

Stirring Up

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[0 : 00] I'll ask you to be seated, though. I could have asked you to remain standing, not for the whole sermon, for which you would be thankful, I think. Not that you couldn't stand for 20 minutes or more, but in the prayer book, it's prescribed that the exhortation is actually read three times throughout the year, and one is actually before Christmas and receiving communion. And one time during the service that can be done is immediately before the sermon, and another time is actually immediately before your confession and then absolution of your sins. So we'll do that a little bit later. It's a little bit longer. I'll allow you to be seated for that, but it's a great kind of exhortation practice in our prayer book tradition. We are continuing in that kind of prayer book tradition with our sermon series that's based on the Advent colics. Today's colic was not authored but edited by Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer, you know, the English reformer and compiler of our first two prayer books. Cranmer edited this colic by adding this phrase. You can turn to it in your prayer book if you want, but he added to the colic, hindered in running the race that is set before us.

Cranmer linked the prayer with Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1. So not only then are we at the end of the colics for this season and this sermon series, but we're also then brought into the text of Hebrews pretty much at the end as well, but not at Hebrews 12, which this colic is linked to, but Hebrews 10, beginning at the 18th verse. Hebrews 10 was selected because of the way that it ends.

If you look down in your Bible, in the text there, it says, the day drawing near, or as the New Living Translation translated it, the day of his, that is Jesus's, return is drawing near. Now, what do you think about that?

Are you anticipating that? Are you looking forward to that? That's the theme of this season and this series. It's the advent of God. Now, it is the second time that this theme has actually come up in the letter of Hebrews, which I realized that we're just kind of plopping down into, but the first was in chapter 9, verse 29, and you can look at your Bible with me now at that.

Chapter 9, verse 29 reads, Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, he's already done that on the cross, but to save those who are already eagerly awaiting him.

[2 : 43] That's the theme of Advent, the eager awaiting of Jesus's return. And that's important to know because when we come to our text, the author becomes really practical now.

Everything before this is doctrinal, laying out the theology of Christ. The author laid out what we should think about our Lord. Now he's going to lay out what Christians should do.

Now, you know that Paul also does this in his letters. The first half are about Christian belief and the second ones are about Christian behavior. Many of his letters are like that. Today's reading is really, really practical, but only because we come to the end of Hebrews.

Okay? So now, at the risk of losing you, let me ask you a question. If you could go any place in the world, where would you go? Maybe you've never been there before, or maybe you've been there and you'd like to return.

But if you could go anywhere in the world in which you live, where would you go? Hebrews has a place in mind. In verse 18, look down with me.

[3 : 53] Sorry, verse 19. Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. You should go down to verse 21.

And since we have a great high priest over the house of God. Again, the NL treaty, when you get to verse 21, repeats what is said in verse 19. That is this holy place of God.

A holy place. Or what I'll call this morning a habitation. Hebrews not only has this habitation in mind, but also a habit.

Advent stirs us up to run the race that's set before us, as Cranmer says, towards a new habitation and a new habit. Or a place to live and a way of living.

A new one, in fact. So let's look at those two things. A new way of living. And first of all, a new place to live. Today's reading begins with the word, therefore.

[4 : 58] And it's connecting us with what has come before. What precedes our reading is the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. Christ died for our sins and in our place as a substitute.

It's the author's understanding of the atoning work of Christ, which gives us access to God in this holy place. It's Christ's priestly work.

He presents God to us, and he represents God to us, and he represents us to God. He's our great high priest.

Now, in evangelicalism, there's this tradition of inviting Jesus into our hearts. But did you know that we're also invited by Christ into his life?

The invitation from him to us comes before our invitation to him. Sorry, our invitation of us to him. And there's a comfort to know Jesus takes up residence in us.

[6 : 03] But what do you think about his invitation to take up residence in him? Hebrews 10, 19 is an invitation to the presence of Christ. That is this holy place.

Now, maybe this time of year, you're issuing invitations. Maybe you've been issued an invitation for Christmas. Hebrews 10, 19 issues this invitation to a new habitation, a holy place.

It is a new habitat for humanity. Our invitation comes in two words here in this text then, to enter in verse 19 and then to draw near in verse 22.

So let's look at this two-part invitation connected to this habitation that the author of Hebrews calls this holy place. So let's first look at the invitation to enter.

Hebrews 10, 19 reads, Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places. Now, in many respects, we are all spiritually homeless.

[7 : 11] Our condition of spiritual homelessness is far graver than a literal one. We fail to recognize it. And maybe our physical condition clouds our spiritual condition.

And we are outside a holy place looking in apart from Jesus Christ. But Jesus Christ's death is our access to this new holy habitation, which the author of Hebrews calls holy places.

Oh, what a privilege it is to enter these holy places. Hebrews has in mind the old covenant temple of God when using holy places. Holy places is the residence and the presence of our Lord.

An entrance was granted to just a limited number of priests. But now that's changed. All people have access to or entrance into this holy place.

But how do we enter? The text is clear. Entrance into this residence and presence of God is by Jesus' death, his blood, his flesh.

[8 : 21] Now, think of a time when you moved into a new residence, how life changed for you. Changed getting there, changed while you were there, changed after.

Hebrews is introducing the Christian to a new place full of privilege, full of change. We get to enter this new habitation like never before because of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and ascension.

The text says, and that happens by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through this curtain that is through his flesh.

This is our access to this new habitation. So we're invited to enter. And that's the first point about our invitation to this new habitation. The second point about this invitation to a new habitation is to draw near.

It's one thing to enter. It's another thing to draw near. Of course, you can't draw near until you've entered, but once you've entered, then what? So verse 21 says, And since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

[9 : 31] This phrase, full assurance of faith, is sometimes the title that's given to this section. But you see, enter the holy place is not all. It isn't enough to enter.

We draw near. And have you ever entered an important place, but just a little bit afraid to draw near to something or someone in that place?

Maybe afraid because of that meaning of the place, or maybe because of the person who is there. We have this invitation to draw near.

And in this case, we're invited to draw near because of the great high priest in verse 21. This Jesus Christ who died for our sins is our great high priest.

There is no need for priests like the old covenant who interceded for the people. Jesus is the one who does that for us. And now there is only Jesus Christ who gains access for us to the presence and the residence of God.

[10:32] But Jesus Christ grants us that access to this holy place. Now this access is not tentatively, as verse 24 shows, full assurance.

And that's similar to the Hebrew word that's mentioned earlier in verse 19, as confidence to come into this place, or other translations, this kind of boldness to enter in.

Without anxiety, but a full assurance of faith, we have access to the Lord. And did you notice that this is a matter of the heart in verse 22?

Two times, look down with me. 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.

It's an allusion, I think, to baptism. That's the access that we're gained and how it is that we gain that access. This heart, which is the seat of our wills and our minds and our souls.

[11:40] It is that soul that makes you, you. And holding nothing back, we're invited to draw near to this holy place, or to draw close with our heart because of who Jesus is and what it is that he's done.

And we're all invited to the holy place or this new habitation and encouraged then to draw near. So what will you do? Well, that's not all.

Though entering and drawing near to the new habitation is important that, while important, it's not enough. We're encouraged then to take up new habits. You see, the holy habitation is for holy habits.

It's not a place just to hang out, but to practice our new lifestyle, our new privilege. So let's look at verses 23 through 25. These new habits or a new way to live.

Hebrews makes this easy for us. The author issues us two clear actions. Our new way to live or new habits are, in verse 23, hold fast.

[12:48] But in verse 24, stir up. Notice that one is a personal habit, but the other is a relational one. Each of us is called to hold fast.

Personally, we do that. We have to take responsibility for it. But each of us also encourage to stir one another up mutually. So we look at this.

First, hold fast. Verse 23 reads, Hold fast is the call.

But to what? Now, in our culture, we hold fast to very few things. We don't hold fast to things except maybe a house, right? Or even if we have one.

But we get rid of things really quickly. And sometimes even more so, ideas. Now, think of how fast values have changed in our world.

[13:45] How we haven't actually held fast to many of them. But Hebrews calls us to hold fast, as you look at that, to what? To a confession of hope. And our confession of hope, I figure, is a mark of Christianity.

I know it's not our only mark. In fact, if you're thinking about your Anglican tradition, I know that the true marks of the church is where the gospel is purely preached and the sacraments are duly ministered. But surely, hope, along with faith that's actually mentioned earlier, are the marks of the Christian life.

And so we're encouraged to hold fast to our confession or a profession of hope. That might even be a better word. Now, you know that I've been on education leave, a sabbatical.

And I was reminded that in doing that, well, while it wasn't that relaxing, a rest is as good as a change. Tried to take that to heart. But in one of my studies, I learned of a remarkably effective and empirically validated form of therapy.

Now, the proponent of this therapy considers clinicians when they practice their theory as merchants of hope. Think about that, merchants of hope.

[15:01] It's an audacious assertion that caregivers might be merchants of hope. But as Christians, we surely have a great basis for hope.

More than empirically validated practices, as we ground our hope in the atoning death of Jesus Christ. Our basis for hope becomes our confession or our profession of hope.

Better than merchants of hope, we can become ministers of hope. As we hold fast to this profession and exercise this new habit, this new way of living, as we find ourselves in this holy habitation, practicing this hope.

But that's not all. We're also called to stir up one another in addition to holding fast this confession of hope. The Hebrews writer says, 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.

That's why I'm talking about habits. The second habit is to stir one another up. Now, when you hear this, if you're steeped in the Anglican colics, you might be saying, well, now, wait a minute.

[16:19] That's not the last colic of Advent, James. That's the last colic before Advent. Right? The colic begins on the last Sunday, or the last before Advent with stir up.

It's a petition, which is kind of like in form this colic today, which begins with rise up or raise up. Right? Well, today's text would be a good text for the last Sunday before Advent, don't you think? Because it has this word stir up in it. Well, here's a little test for those of you who are kind of prayer book folk. Okay? Or you want to be, maybe. Which day of the year is the text for today prescribed for?

Would it be A for today's, or would it be B for stir up Sunday, which seems to actually make sense because it has the word stir up for it, or would it be C, Good Friday?

You're probably guessing now that it's actually Good Friday. This text that we're looking at today is a Good Friday text, though we're using it the last Sunday of Advent, though it could have been used for the last Sunday before Advent.

[17:31] But it's great, isn't it? Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Love and good works are a habit. They're a new way of Christian living for every day, every Sunday of the year.

And this is a different habit than hold fast, stirring up. It's not individual, but it's relational. It's not personal, though kind of, but it's mutual.

Mutually stirring one another up to love, good works, and fellowship. Worship. Not giving up the habit of meeting together as some are. And I know that I don't need to spell out for you what it looks like to practice this habit of love and good works and fellowship.

You don't need me to tell you what that's like. However, I need you, and you need me, to stir one another up to do that. Even though we know what love, even though we know what fellowship, even though we know kind of probably what good works are.

We need one another to stir one another up to do those things on a regular basis, stirring one another up. I live in Ladner, and we have a coffee shop called Stirs, which I kind of like the name of that.

[18:51] We stir contents into our coffee, but we don't need to stir extras into our gospel. We stir coffee to cool it down, but we don't need to cool down our gospel.

We need a pure, hot gospel. And we all need one another to stir one another up to love and good works and to meeting together.

Because it's easy just to say, well, you know, I'll do this tomorrow, or I'll do this next week, or I'll do this sometimes later. But we need one another to stir one another up by the grace of God for those good, holy habits.

Well, now, our final phrase challenges us if we tend to think that way. If you look down the last verse 25, it says, all the more as you see the day drawing near.

And that day is the return of Jesus Christ, our King. How long? The subjects of the King may ask. Well, the King is on his way, and he's almost here.

[20:05] So today's text is full of application. Enter, draw near, hold fast, stir up. And what if we do that? What would it look like if we did that?

Well, my hope by faith and love is that we will know and others who are yet to know the great pleasure that it is to live in the holy place and in the presence of the Lord.

And that it far exceeds any other place that we think that we'd much rather be or much rather go and visit. That holy place of Christ with the habits that we practice because he's given them to us by his grace and showed to one another.

And I speak to you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.