

Sunday July 24, 2011

## **LET US**

Guest Speaker: Nancy Vamvakas

Good morning!

As I look around the auditorium, I am struck by 2 things - how many people I don't know – how many people are relatively new to TOB. I love to see it! And I am also struck by how many people I do know, and who are very important to me...and I love that too! This community, the TOB family, is a core part of my life, and according to the Bible, that's the way it is supposed to be.

Being part of a local church community, being part of a local expression of the body of Christ, has a purpose. Over the centuries, this purpose has been mistaken, abused and neglected, but time cannot and will not change the purposes of God. The purpose for the church remains – to participate in the Mission of God, as his partners here on earth.

It is starting to get embarrassing to say this, but I am STILL a part-time student at Tyndale Seminary, although I only have one course left until I graduate! As has been my practice over the last 6 years of speaking to you at TOB, I want to share something I have learned over the last year of my courses. In 2010, I took two terms of the History of Christianity, which was very helpful for me. In looking at the History of Early Church, we can see how Christ's disciples and those first generations of followers struggled to establish the local gathering. Jesus did not leave manuals for church planting and successful operation. He left us his example of faithful living, his Word, and he left us His Spirit to guide us in interpreting and applying his example and Word. I have to admit, though, it is hard work. In the History of the Modern Church, we can see how we repeatedly get it wrong, and how God repeatedly raises up leaders and to give us insight to draw us back again and again to his Truth and his Mission.

Right now, I am serving as one of your elected members of the Governing Board, and we are asking ourselves a lot of questions about what it means to participate in the Mission of God,

and what it means to be the church. It has challenged us to ask the important questions of why we gather and why we scatter. This morning, I want to look at the question of why we gather.

Why is it that we get together each week to worship? God's direction to Israel in the Old Testament clearly required regular corporate gathering on the Sabbath. Does the New Testament have the same requirement? Why do we sing, pray have a sermon – do we really need a sermon? I know what some of you would say!!! These are big questions, and require we give thoughtful consideration to our answers. There are sincere, God-loving Christians of all denominations and backgrounds all over the world now asking the same questions, trying to find ways of showing love and obedience to our King.

As we have struggled with these questions, we realize that there are some things at TOB we have done really well over the last 7 ½ years. We have built a sense of community. We have valued the need to bring your brain to church, ask questions and challenge convention. We have given generously to those in need – the poor, the weak, the sick, the marginalized. We have recognized that going on a Mission trip means crossing the street as much as it means crossing town or crossing an ocean. And there are some things that we have not done as well as we hoped to do. We don't yet have a vibrant Small Group network, which we call Roots. We have many awesome Roots Groups, but not as many as we need if we are going to disciple people and maximize our impact outside these walls. While we are pretty good at sharing Christ with people who come into the building, we aren't as good at preparing ourselves for sharing Christ with those we meet along life's path. We have faced some challenges over the last couple of years, with Staff transitions, and tough economic times. As well, the excitement of starting something new morphed into the challenges of sustaining momentum and growth, there is no question that we have some hard work to do with structure and leadership. But we are committed to striving forward, and to continuing to seek God's will for TOB collectively, and for each of us individually, as it relates to partnering in his Mission. I would ask each of you to be praying regularly for our church and for our leadership.

Let's pray now.

*Heavenly Father;*

*We come before you, Lord, humbled by your presence, in awe of your Majesty and Glory. We praise you for the beauty of your mission, your plans to restore all of creation, and we thank you for the privilege of being your hands and feet. We confess to you our failures, as a church, and as individuals. We have often failed to seek your guidance, follow your directions, and give you the glory and honor for our salvation and provision. But you are Grace and mercy, and in you there is new life for each of us. And there is new life for The Olive Branch and the worldwide church. Guide us Lord, and give us strength to follow. Speak to us through your Word and by your presence. In Jesus name, Amen.*

The background I learned in History of Christianity was the perfect setting for then going on to study the Book of Hebrews, and it is here I found the learning that I wanted to share with you this morning.

For a long time, the book of Hebrews was understood to be a letter, but what we have in the book of Hebrews is a Sermon – a genuine, first century sermon! And so as a sermon, we have a first hand view into the teaching of the early church, giving us glimpses into how they lived as a church, what they did, and how they worshipped. This is very exciting to have at a time when we are wrestling with our own question of what the community of Christ is supposed to be and do.

So this morning, I want us to hear Hebrews as a sermon. This will have its challenges, for sure. We don't know exactly who is the author of Hebrews, or the audience, although we can tell some things from the clues provided. The author was incredibly educated and articulate, from the Greek used. He appears to be a friend and pastor to the community he was addressing. He received the Good News from a disciple of Jesus, making him a second generation Christian. The audience was likely a house church in Rome, also made of second generation Christians, mostly from Jewish descent. Which explains why its argument relies so heavily on knowledge of the laws of Leviticus and other Old Testament books.

To study Hebrews is to enter the world of 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine, which can seem like a huge barrier. We might even wonder if there is any point? How could a sermon to 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Jews possibly have relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century Canadian Christians?

But what if I told you that the sermon was given to encourage a group of Christians who had been dealing with real hardship in their lives? Who looked at the world around them and had trouble explaining the gap between the peace Christ promised and the peace they experienced every day? Christians who declared that Jesus is Lord, even though in their world, it often looked more like Caesar was lord. They were tempted to take short-cuts in their Christian walk to just blend in - make it easier to earn a living, or be part of the social scene or protect their children from bullying. These were people who were mocked or excluded from their families or communities because being a Christian was regarded as foolish or cultish, or intolerant. These were Christians who had been faithful yet they felt life only getting harder. These were Christians who, quite frankly, were running out of steam, and starting to wonder if it was worth it. This sermon speaks to a group of Christians who needed some encouragement to persevere through their tough times. All of a sudden, 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine doesn't look so far away.

It seems to me, that Hebrews is as much for us today, as it was for our first century brothers and sisters. It seems to me, that if it is part of our Bible, it is not only God's revelation of himself, but it is His encouragement for every generation of our brothers and sisters! It seems to me, that we need to listen to the sermon of Hebrews today.

Listening to Hebrews this morning, my prayer is threefold: first that we leave with a refreshed sense of who Jesus is, and what he has done for us. Second, we understand that following Jesus requires perseverance. And third, that we understand the connection between perseverance and our gathering together.

Hebrews begins:

**<sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:1-3 TNIV)**

Every community of Christ followers needs reminding that Jesus is God's final Word to us. It is conclusive, it is complete. Jesus has accomplished all that needed to be accomplished. As heir, he is One with the Father. As our High Priest, he has conclusively dealt with sin. And as King, he sits at the right hand of God, ruling over all creation. This is the truth. This is ultimate reality.

This is the first reason we come together as Christians. Together, we hear God's final Word speak, and we are reminded that what we confess is true. Its why we have the tradition of a sermon. No where in the Bible does it say we need to have a 30 minute sermon, but it does say that the Holy Spirit has appointed teachers for the ministry of the Word. And it is recorded in Acts 2:42 about those who came to faith in Christ.

**“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”**

The Sermon is one way of teaching a community from God's Word, to increase our confidence in who God is and what he is up to so that we can order our lives accordingly. This is what the Author of Hebrews does. His sermon is a presentation of who Jesus is, what he did and what it means. It is an amazing presentation of the ultimate reality!

Of course, in our time together this morning, I can't take you through the whole sermon, but as an overview, the pastor starts with a declaration of what they believe and proceeds to give them assurances from OT Scripture and the Apostles testimonies that Jesus is, in fact, God's Son, and is both our King and High Priest. He assures them that what Christ accomplished through his life, his death and in the resurrection is fully sufficient to deal with their sin, secure their eternal salvation and provide strength and power in this life.

As I read Hebrews, I try to imagine the response of his weary audience. He is pouring words of hope and encouragement into them. From the introduction through to the middle of Chapter 10, he has helped assure them of the truth of their faith. Jesus is Lord! It is now we reach the turning point of the Sermon, the climax he has been building to. I have given you a copy of it on the other side of your handout, and it is from Hebrews 10:19-39 that I want to speak to you today.

We start with the first paragraph, which summarizes all the evidence he has given earlier - vv 19-25

**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

Notice the grammatical set up Therefore, since we have....let us.... It is a common literary device in Hebrews and it is a great clue that he is going to answer the question “how then shall we live?” Vv 19-21 summarize our confession of faith – it is the “since we have” section. Jesus has made a new way for us to enter into God’s presence, and his everlasting presence as our High Priest means that he represents us before God at all times – in this life and the life to come. Our prayers and confessions are always before God.

These believers needed to hear the “since we have” section. I need to hear the “since we have” section. You also need to hear the “since we have” section. We need to come together and declare to each other that what we see through the eyes of faith is true and real. We come together to declare that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. Today, we might need to say “Jesus is Lord and Money is not” or “popular opinion is not” or “Self-gratification is not”. Because sometimes, our eyes and ears and hands and feet deceive us. Sometimes, when tornadoes strike, or cancer spreads or divorce papers arrive, or teenagers accidentally kill policemen and children are sold into the sex trade....sometimes we can be deceived into thinking that Caesar is lord. Coming together, we declare the full truth of the end time even before it arrives. We choose to live by faith and not by sight.

You know, sometimes, I am the one that needs to be reminded. Other days, I need to remind others. Either way, it means I need to be part of a gathering, and you do too. There is a God-ordained connection between gathering and seeing ultimate reality.

You know what I particularly love about this? The powers of darkness tremble when we come together and declare the resurrected Christ. When we declare the enthroned Christ. When we declare our loyalty and love for the King who has declared his loyalty and love for us...the enemy is weakened. And the enemy is further weakened when we act on our faith. When we live today the truth that Christ is Lord.

Because we are called to a response. That is the “let us” section of our passage. Since we have Christ, “let us” respond. The 3 “let us” statements call us to faith, hope and love. Faith - The full assurance of faith that God has indeed forgiven us our sin and truly cleansed us from all unrighteousness inside and out – heart and body. Hope - that God will fulfill his promises, because God is faithful. And love. We are to encourage each other to live with love for God and love for one another. And notice that love here is not just some feeling we have – it is link to “love and good deeds”. We encourage each other to love and good deeds. Jesus showed us what he meant by “good deeds” by the way he lived – healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the poor, clothing the naked, fighting injustice, offering grace, love and fellowship to everyone.

And how do we encourage each other? Look at the final sentence in this paragraph - “not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other....” Meeting together is essential for encouraging. If we give up meeting together, we are missing the opportunities of encouraging each other to love and good deeds. This is the second reason we gather. There is a God-ordained connection between gathering and encouraging others to love and good deeds.

Lots of people have said to me over the years, “I don’t need to go to church to be a good Christian”. If by that someone means “I don’t have to go to a traditional church building on Sunday morning to be a good Christian” I can agree. However, respectfully, if someone means “I don’t have to be part of the gathering of Christians to be a good Christian”, I join with the Author of Hebrews, and disagree. Here in Hebrews, we have direct encouragement in the NT for believers to be part of the Christian community.

Quite a bit is lost in the English translation, but we have to take this encouragement seriously. The Greek word translated as “giving up” or “abandoning” is the same word used by Jesus in

Matthew and Mark's account of Jesus cry on the cross "Father, why have you abandoned me?" (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34) and is used again in Hebrews 13:5: "**God will not abandon you.**" To "give up" or "abandon" can be understood as an intentional rejection.

Then the Greek word used for "meeting together", or "the assembly" in other translations, is episyngoge. It is used only one other time in the whole NT, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, which is speaking about Christ's second coming, and refers to the gathering of his people at the end times. In using this Greek word, the first audience would have understood that the gathering of believers is nothing less than being part of the gathering of the whole believing community that spans heaven and earth. Every time we gather, including Sunday mornings, or in our small groups, or in ministry teams, we have to think beyond the bodies in this room. We have to expand our concept of community and think through time and space. Every time we gather, like right now, we are joined by centuries of believers witnessing from the heavens. We are joined by hosts of angels. We are joined by our brothers and sisters around the world, whether in cathedrals, homes, underground churches, jungles or deserts. We are part of something way bigger than any one gathering with the full power of our Creator protecting us, guiding us, empowering us and sending us forward. That is worth getting up Sunday mornings for!

So to give up meeting together, or to abandon the assembly, is to intentionally reject the community that experiences the presence of God and the community where his saving grace is received. It is not just dropping something off a busy to do list, it is disengaging yourself from Jesus himself. This is a serious thing, which is why our Author offers such a stern warning in vv 26-31.

**<sup>26</sup> If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much more severely do you think those deserve to be punished who have trampled the Son of God underfoot, who have treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who have insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who**

**said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”<sup>[a]</sup> and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>31</sup> It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**

Within the context of Hebrews, “To deliberately keep on sinning” is another reference to the abandoning of the community. It is to choose not to persevere. Hebrews warns that the consequences of this choice are irrevocable and horrible. “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” To be judged by God without the representation of Jesus. It is up to the community to encourage each other forward in faith, so that we don’t lose anyone along the way.

I find these verses really difficult. One reason is because I would really rather ignore the Holy God that judges and condemns and concentrate on the Loving God who saves. But they are 2 sides of the same coin. To ignore one part is to devalue the other. His requirement for Holiness makes His gift of grace and forgiveness so awesome. It is because He alone is authorized to judge us that He alone can offer us grace. Both views of Him held together make him worthy of our worship, and worthy of our response to be holy as he is Holy.

Yet we can’t confuse being holy with being perfect and earning our salvation. The Bible is pretty clear that no one can attain perfection apart from the sacrifice of Jesus.

### **Romans 3:22-24**

**... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.**

And Ephesians 2:8-10

**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

Jesus has offered us access to God and eternal representation before God. His perfection covers our imperfection. His holiness covers our unholiness. And our appropriate response of gratitude is love and good deeds.

Another reason the passage is difficult is because some have understood it to mean that believers can lose their salvation, that we can somehow fall from God's grace. We could take a whole bunch of Sundays just to discuss this topic – it poses a serious dilemma. If a believer can lose their salvation, then the Christian life is one of anxiety and uncertainty – am I saved? Am I not? And can lead to life on a performance plan – have I done enough to earn forgiveness yet? On the other hand, if it is impossible to lose our salvation, then we are at risk of becoming morally and spiritually apathetic to the demands of the Gospel.

Given promises elsewhere in Scripture that Jesus will not let anyone be snatched from his hand, I suggest that the Authors of Hebrews was not teaching that a believer can lose their salvation. We have to take Hebrews for what it is – a sermon to a community. This sermon includes teaching, encouragements and warnings. And as we all know, in every church, in every faith community, there are believers, almost believers, and unbelievers; and sometimes it is hard to tell them apart. Different parts of the message were for different parts of the community.

We can understand, then, that the warning passages, are intended for almost believers or non believers, who have not yet made a decision to put their faith in what Jesus has offered, and may be tempted to walk away. It is very hard to say this, but I wouldn't be loving anyone if I didn't say it. If you have been attending a church, any church, that celebrates that Jesus as Saviour and Lord, and you have heard God's Word taught, and the Good News of salvation preached, and you have personally experienced the blessings of God by being part of the community of God, and then you walk away, you are not just leaving "a" gathering, you are leaving "the" gathering. You are choosing to reject Jesus. You have declared Jesus' sacrifice "not good enough" and have rejected the only Grace that can save you from eternal judgment.

Please hear me clearly. I am not saying that if you miss Sunday mornings for a month, you are rejecting Christ and walking away, and will fall into God's judgment. I am not saying that

if you leave one gathering to go to another gathering you are rejecting Christ. I am saying that we must be part of “the” gathering in some way. I am saying that when we talk about the assembly, we are talking about a real community that is part of something eternal. I am saying that we are called to persevere. And if we are to persevere in our faith through all times and circumstances, we are meant to be part of that assembly.

The Author of Hebrews was concerned some in the gathering were tempted to quit. Times were hard again, and they were getting weary. Being a Christian was becoming difficult again. So to encourage any of those who are tempted to abandon God’s community, the author proceeds to remind them how the community persevered in the past.

**<sup>32</sup> Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. <sup>33</sup> Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. <sup>34</sup> You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. <sup>35</sup> So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. <sup>36</sup> You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.**

Verses 32-36 speaks to those who are weary from their suffering. They have served, they have given, they have been publicly humiliated. They have stood together through persecution, and took care of their brothers and sisters imprisoned for their faith. They endured the confiscation of their property. How did they persevere? They kept their eyes on the promises of God. They did not allow the “things” of this world to deter them from seeking first the better and lasting possessions. The Author now recalls their earlier perseverance as a call to continued perseverance. He is saying to them....you have done it before. You can do it! Keep on keeping on. Don’t quit. It is worth it..

Our passage finishes with some references from Isaiah and Habakkuk.

**<sup>37</sup> For, “In just a little while,  
he who is coming will come  
and will not delay.”<sup>[c]</sup>**

<sup>38</sup> **And,**

**“But my righteous one<sup>[d]</sup> will live by faith.  
And I take no pleasure  
in the one who shrinks back.”<sup>[e]</sup>**

<sup>39</sup> **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.**

These references were encouragements to persevere given to Israel. The context in Habakkuk is especially helpful, as it records God’s response to Habakkuk when he complained that the wicked seemed to be winning. God reassured him that His justice would come for the righteous.

This is a third reason we need to gather as a community. We need to encourage those who are weary from the struggle. Bill Hybels, the Senior Pastor at Willowcreek Community Church in Michigan, told a story once at a conference I was at. He talked about one of his congregants who asked to meet with him. This man gave generously and sacrificially with his time and with his money. He shared his gifts with the church.

When he met with Bill, the discussion went something like this. My accountant says I am crazy to give this much money to the church. My business partners say I am crazy to spend so much time with the church. Our friends tell us we are crazy to give up so many other social or sports opportunities for ourselves and our kids in order to come to church on Sundays and serve during the week.

Please....I just need someone to tell me I am not crazy.

Why do we gather? To encourage one another – to remind each other that we are not crazy. That the world we see is not all there is. That our sacrifices, and our struggles, are worth it, even when we can’t see the results with our senses. We need to tell each other stories, from the Bible and from our own lives, of when God has moved in impossible situations to remind ourselves that God CAN and DOES move in impossible situations.

If we were able to read on this morning, in his sermon, the author would do exactly that. In Chapter 11, he takes us through the Faith Hall of Fame, giving a list of many people in history who persevered and remained faithful despite the fact that they never, in their human lives, saw the results of their contribution. People who kept their eyes fixed on their final destination....like Abraham, who died without ever seeing the nation he was promised. Or Joseph, who never saw Israel return to the promised land. Or Moses, who saw but never entered the promised land. Or King David, who died without seeing the Temple built. And the list ends with Jesus, who was the ultimate example of perseverance, enduring shame and death on a cross, before receiving his heavenly crown and throne. The hall of fame acknowledges all the people who stayed true to their faith, even though in this life they never received what had been promised...but their descendents did, because God is faithful to his promises. These were all people who were likely called crazy. We join an incredible group of God's witnesses when we persevere in our struggles.

I want to encourage you this morning. For those of you who teach children and youth about Jesus... it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who spend time praying for others... it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who care for young children, sick friends and family members or aging parents... it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who conduct your business lives with integrity and lose opportunities because you won't cheat people, underpay or compromise on safety and quality....it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who take time to meet with people in difficult circumstances, to offer food, clothing, water, friendship... it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who give sacrificially of your financial resources... it matters and you are not crazy. For those who give up their free time to go on mission trips – either across town or across the world – in order to share Christ's love and care with those who have not heard the Gospel message...it matters and you are not crazy. For those of you who stand up against injustice or persecution in the school yard, in the work place or in the court system...it matters and you are not crazy. I want to encourage you all to persevere in living out your faith in Jesus, no matter what it costs because it matters and we are not crazy.

The Christian life is characterized by perseverance.

**“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.**

**And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” Hebrews 12:1-2**

We can't quit; we can't give up, we can never let go of the inheritance we have in Jesus. We are called to persevere in our faith. What is it going to take for you and I to do that?

Certainly the Word of God, and the power of His Holy Spirit. But it also takes a Christian community. You may be OK for a little while, but you will NOT stand long against opposition, persecution or oppression alone. God meant us to do it together. That is why we gather – to help each other persevere. There is a God-ordained connection between gathering and perseverance.

The sermon of Hebrews is a powerful word from God. It gives us a renewed vision of who Jesus is and what he did, and it calls us to persevere in faithful response.

Friends SINCE WE HAVE the love and grace of our almighty God;

1. LET US persevere by gathering to declare and celebrate that Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not. We praise God for the work he accomplished through Jesus and for the salvation we have received and the everlasting representation we have before the throne. We hold up the reality we know by faith in defiance of the reality we experience. We can do this by singing, playing music, praying, reading God's Word. We collect an offering – a strong and visible way of declaring Jesus is Lord and Money is not. We take communion together – declaring our confidence that he will come again! Sometimes we have drama or dance or eat pancakes together. It is all worship. The way we do it is less important than THAT we do it together.

2. LET US persevere by gathering to encourage each other to love and good deeds. We can have faith and hope on our own, but not love. Again, by studying the biblical examples or by sharing our own stories, we are inspired by each other. Anytime we gather with Christian brothers and sisters to encourage each other to love and good works, whether it is Sunday mornings, Roots groups, or other kind of gathering of believers, we are helping each other to persevere.

This fall, we are starting a group of initiatives through our Roots groups to offer everyone encouragement to love and good deeds. Our aim is to provide a range of opportunities to serve outside these walls as part of a Christian community. Our opportunities are limited to our imaginations and our own willingness to lead. We are looking for leaders and for ideas about community needs to meet. We are looking for as many people as possible to join in for an 8 week session and give this a try. You will hear more about this at the Annual General Meeting, which I encourage you all to attend on Sept 20 right after the one 10:00 service.

3. Lastly, LET US persevere by gathering to encourage those who are weary in their journey, and who are tempted to quit. We can tell each other, you are not crazy. Keep on, keeping on. It is worth it. If life is good for you right now, look around for who you can encourage. If life is rough, and you feel your faith is on shakey ground, look around you for someone to encourage you. The prayer room after the service is a great place to start. But don't give up meeting together!

Friends, the "Day" is approaching. It is coming "in just a little while". God's heart aches for every part of his creation to be redeemed. For every person to accept the salvation that is offered. But it is a choice and there are consequences for each choice. Shrink back and be destroyed or believe and be saved.

Let us be ones who do not shrink back, but believe and are saved. Let's pray:

*Father;*

*Thank you for our time together this morning – a time of renewal, strengthening and encouragement. Thank you for Jesus, the radiance of your Glory and the exact representation of your being. We declare and celebrate Christ resurrected and enthroned at your right hand! We announce that Christ will come again.*

*We choose belief. We choose salvation.*

*Help us now to live our lives in the light of that truth. Give us strength to persevere, no matter what comes our way, no matter what it costs. Thank you that you will not let your children be snatched from your hand.*

*Amen.*

### Closing and Blessing:

This morning, if you would like to pray with someone after the service, there are some wonderful people waiting in the prayer room in the back to help. You may want to pray for some people in your life who need encouragement. Or you may need some encouragement. Or maybe you have been going to church for some time and have seen first hand the power of God at work in people's lives and you are ready to accept that gift for yourself. Don't wait. The Day is approaching.

We looked at 2 small passages of Hebrews this morning, and we didn't even have enough time for those! But for me to talk to you about those verses, I had to read the whole book of Hebrews many times to put them in context. And I now offer you the opportunity to read it right through too. This may feel like I am giving you homework....but that's only because I am!!

But, SINCE we have had a taste of Hebrews, and SINCE we have an eagerness to learn more about God, LET US now sit down some time this week and read it in one sitting, imagining we are having it preached to us. SINCE we have been given this book by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and SINCE we have a calling to join God in his mission, LET US benefit from the full blessings of this sermon, from its reminder of who Christ is and what he did, to the encouragements to love, good deeds, and perseverance through our struggles. I have provided you with an outline of the book to help you.

I leave you with the closing blessing from Hebrews 13:20-21

**<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**