

As Long As We Have Jesus **Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25**

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were the last two surviving members of the original revolutionaries who had stood up to the British empire to forge a new political system in the American colonies. However, while they both believed in democracy and in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, they had very different opinions on how to achieve those ideals. Over time their differences resulted in a very long and bitter feud.

On New Year's Day in 1812 John Adams made the first move to end the feud. He sent Jefferson a letter in which he wished Jefferson many happy new years to come. Jefferson responded with a note in which he fondly recalled when they were fellow laborers in the same cause. Over the next 14 years, these former revolutionaries went on to resume their friendship during their golden years. If you are into that sort of stuff, their correspondence is a national treasure and well worth the read.

As fate would have it, these two former Presidents who were initially fellow Patriots and then political adversaries only to once again become friends died on the same day: July 4, 1826.

Adams' last words were: "Thomas Jefferson still survives." Sadly, he was mistaken, for Jefferson had died five hours earlier.

There is a sentiment there I want us to capture as we focus on today's lectionary texts. Adams died believing that, despite its struggles, our country was going to be fine because Jefferson was still alive to offer guidance. I want to phrase his words like this:

We will be fine ... as long as we have ... Thomas Jefferson.

Now go with me to the Gospel text for the day (Mark 13:1-8). In it, Jesus paints a very dire picture about what is to come one future day:

(Jesus speaking): Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are just the beginning ... (Mark 13:8)

If you read the rest of Mark 13, Jesus tells His followers that it will get even worse than He described in those two sentences.

Mark's Gospel does not record the reaction of the disciples who heard these words. But we can imagine what they were thinking, right? It is probably pretty close to what you and I would be thinking in their circumstances. Or in ours!!

- Two hurricanes hit the southern portion of our country in a matter of weeks.
- Wildfires are on both coasts.
- They are shooting at airplanes trying to land in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.
- Teenagers beat up a priest in Cincinnati.

- That doesn't even reflect the war in the Middle East ... or the Ukraine ... or the apparent movement of North Korean troops into Russia... or rising hostilities with Iran ... And much more!

Oh, if only we still had Thomas Jefferson!

No. Jefferson isn't our answer. Our answer has a different J name . In the midst of the chaos of our current days, we will continue to be fine ...

We will be fine ... as long as we have ... Jesus.

That brings us back to the Hebrews text:

But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. (Hebrews 10:12-13)

Do you want to hear some good news? Jefferson may be dead, but Jesus still lives. And because He lives ... and reigns in heaven ... the writer of our text offers four suggestions for how we face these chaotic times.

1. LET US DRAW NEAR TO GOD

Look at Hebrews 10:22:

... let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, (Hebrews 10:22)

Forty years ago, a man named Richard Foster wrote a book that described 12 classic spiritual disciplines (or practices) that would enable everyday Christians like you and me to draw close to God. This is the first sentence of that book:

Superficiality is the curse of our age. (*Richard Foster*)

Foster went on to say:

The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people. (*Richard Foster*)

Far too many Christians, Foster says, are content to live on the fringes of faith. Years ago I found this poem by Wilbur Rees that communicates the same idea. It is titled "Three Dollars Worth of God."

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.

I don't want enough of God to make me love a black man
or pick beets with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.
I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.
I would like to buy just \$3 worth of God, please. (*Wilbur Rees*)

This world needs people who are willing and eager to go deep with God – to draw close enough to Him that we become like Him.

If you hang out on the fringes of faith you have nothing to anchor you when the storms of life come. You are like dried leaves in a windstorm, blown all around. But the closer you grow to God, the deeper your roots go ... so when those storms come, you stand strong.

But that only happens if you draw close to God.

2. LET US HOLD ONTO OUR FAITH

Look at Hebrews 10:23:

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.
(Hebrews 10:23)

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians at a time when Nero was persecuting people of faith. Nero, if you remember from your high school history class, was an immoral, wicked man who “fiddled while Rome burned.”

- He had to deflect the “heat,” so he blamed Christians for the fires.
- He did some horrendous things to make those Christians pay for the crime.

All of that was causing these first readers of Hebrews to wonder if their faith was worth everything they had to endure.

- “What if we just went back to our Jewish roots?” they wondered.

So the writer sends these words of encouragement. In the *Message* paraphrase, the heading for this section is:

Don't throw your faith away.

You and I both know people who gave up on God when they hit hard times. It's painful for us to watch that happen ... especially when it is inside our own families. And there are no easy answers to the questions they raise. But still the writer encourages us: Don't throw your faith away! Why? Because, the text says ...

God always keeps His promises. (Hebrews 10:23, *The Message*)

3. LET US ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER

Look at Hebrews 10:24:

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds ... (Hebrews 10:24)

Robert Schuller tells a story about a banker who always tossed a coin in the cup of a legless beggar who sat on the street outside the bank. But, unlike most people, the banker would always insist on getting one of the pencils the man had beside him.

- "You are a merchant," the banker would say, "and I always expect to receive good value from merchants I do business with."
- One day the legless man was not on the sidewalk. Time passed and the banker forgot about him, until he walked into a public building and there in the concessions stand sat the former beggar. He was obviously the owner of his own small business now.
- "I have always hoped you might come by someday," the man said to the banker. "You are largely responsible for me being here. You kept telling me that I was a 'merchant'. So, I started to think of myself that way. Instead of a beggar receiving gifts, I decided to start selling pencils, and I sold a lot of them. Your encouragement gave me self-respect. It caused me to look at myself differently."

Did you know the majority of cards sold by Hallmark offer words of encouragement?

- If the greeting card industry knows the impact of encouragement, should we in the church be on the forefront of that movement?

Everyone in the church benefits from words of encouragement, especially when things are not going well. And it's free to give!

- Can I especially ask you to intentionally be encouraging to the youth and children of our congregation? Cheer them on!

4. LET US KEEP ON MEETING TOGETHER

Verse 25:

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing ... (Hebrews 10:25)

Several years ago an anonymous person sent a letter to the editor of the newspaper. In it he wrote that, after much thought, he had decided it made no sense for him to go to church every Sunday.

- "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."
- This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher:

- “I’ve been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this: They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today.”

Please do not underestimate the value of the community aspect of our faith.

- Our faith is not a faith of isolation. We are a community. (See chapter one of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book *Life Together*.)

The story is told about President James A. Garfield’s first Sunday in Washington after his inauguration. A member of his cabinet insisted that a special cabinet meeting be called at 10 a.m. the following day, which was Sunday, to handle a matter of grave importance.

- President Garfield declined, saying that he had something else to do at that time.
- The cabinet member insisted that the President break his previous engagement but Garfield refused.
- The cabinet member then raised his voice, “I demand to know with whom you could have an engagement so important that it cannot be broken so that you can address this urgent matter of national business.”
- Garfield replied, “Sir, I will be as frank as you are. My engagement is with the Lord, to meet together with His people in His house and around His table at 10:30 a.m. tomorrow, and I will be there.”

Garfield got it, and the writer of Hebrews suggests we get it too.

APPLICATION

All through this series of sermons I have been trying to encourage you to look above the circumstances of life to see Jesus ... to intentionally look for Jesus. I personally have been praying that would be the case in my own life.

- Each day in my devotions I am praying, “Help me see Jesus today.”

Last week I had a Jesus sighting that I think is the perfect segue into next Sunday’s celebration of Christ the King. If you follow me on Facebook, you probably already saw this.

- As I was coming out of Panera last Monday morning, the angle was just right for me to capture this picture (of the cross above the “Ubreakitfix” store on Bechtle Avenue.

This reminded me that Jesus is showing Himself all around us ... if we just look for Him.

I want to see Jesus! Amen.