

## Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> October – Hebrews 10:11-25 ‘Draw near with faith’

One of the things you have to learn about when you get ordained, especially in the Church of England, is Registrar’s Ink (SHOW BOTTLE). It looks harmless enough, doesn’t it? But, actually it’s pretty evil stuff. We have to use this ink for official records – in the days when wedding registers formed the official record of a marriage in church, I had to write everything using this ink. It’s so powerful it corrodes the inside of a stainless-steel fountain pen – I’m surprised the bottle doesn’t come with some sort of warning, and pictures of people wearing hazmat suits!

The reason it’s such strong stuff is that this ink lasts forever. If you were to leave it 100 years or even 1,000 years, you could return to the document and it would still be clearly legible. It never fades.

Many of us feel like that about bad stuff in our lives. We look back at things we said or did wrong, fallouts we regret, moments of madness we can’t take back, and it haunts us. It’s like a stain on our hearts that never fades, written in Registrar’s Ink. Hard as we try, we can’t scrub it out. Years later it’s still there, clear as ever.

### **What the cure? Is there anything that can erase the stain?**

Over the last few weeks, we’ve looked at this amazing letter to the Hebrews and followed the argument of the writer. It’s been quite dense, but it’s repaid the effort. We’ve seen how Jesus is better than every other spiritual path, and most importantly, how he fulfils the sacrificial system, because he is both the perfect priest, representing God to us and us to God, and also the perfect sacrifice, once for all, fulfilling the whole religious system, which had been in place for more than a thousand years.

It's wonderful stuff, but if much of the last few chapters has been the ‘what’, today we get to another powerful ‘so what’ moment. If all of this true, so what? What does it mean for us? The answer is in verse 14: ‘For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.’ Just take a moment to let that sink in, because if you’re a follower of Jesus, he’s talking about you: ‘For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.’

If you are a follower of Jesus, you are now perfect for ever. Not because of anything you’ve done, any recompense you can make for your sin, any spiritual version of Mr Muscle you’ve scrubbed away at your heart with. As v11 reminds us, no form of human sacrifice can ever take away our sin. **It’s because of Jesus’ perfect sacrifice, once for all. In God’s eyes, this makes you perfect for ever.**

Wow! And note that being perfect is not the same as being holy: ‘he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.’ We are perfect, but we are becoming holy. What’s that all about? It’s like this: thanks to Jesus we are perfect – this is now a state of being, not some sort of life exam. In fact, it’s like God has looked at the exams of our lives – 28% see me afterwards, 43% could do better, 61% room for improvement – crossed out the actual mark and written 100% over the top. But we can still become more holy, our lives can still continue to reflect the love and wisdom of Jesus just a little bit more day by day, year by year. It doesn’t change the final mark, because God has decided that – but **in Christ we are not just human beings, we are human becomings.** To pick up the wonderful verse in Jeremiah which the author quotes: God has chosen not to remember our sins any more (and that’s a choice, an active decision to forget) but he still has plenty of work to do with each of us, writing his law ever more on our hearts and minds.

So, before we move on to the second half of the passage, just take a moment to imagine all that indelible ink simply being washed off by the blood of Jesus – the only thing that can remove it. God has chosen to remember all those sins and regrets no more – pray for grace that *you* can, too.

I could end there, couldn't I? But there is more amazing stuff to come – and thankfully the writer has kind of written the second half of my sermon for me, as he's given three actual points in the text. They don't all begin with the same letter, but hey, you can't have everything. Verse 19 begins 'therefore' – so with Jesus perfect sacrifice still in our minds, how should we live?

**First, the writer says, 'Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.'** In the Church of England, the call to communion starts with these words: 'Draw near with faith.' If you've ever wondered where that came from, now you know! It's right here in Hebrews 10:22. We can draw near to God! That might sound obvious, but let's remember how many religious cultures don't think they can approach God at all. Even in Jewish culture, when God appeared in the Old Testament, people fell face down. But here the writer says: 'Let us draw near to God.' And he reminds us that our hearts are sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. That's why we say confession in a service, it's like a fresh sprinkling – God's choice to forgive us for everything already hasn't changed, but it does help us to remember our status – thanks to Jesus, God sees us as perfect. Your heart is sprinkled and clean: you can draw near to God. You can rest in his presence, you can pray for what you need, and others need, too.

**Second, 'let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.' Hold fast, the author says.** I know all about swerving – if you cycle on British roads, and you're not swerving accidentally because of the wind, you're swerving because of the potholes. They're not good for car axles, but they're disastrous for bikes. But if I have to swerve all the time on my bike, with faith it's different. I don't want to swerve – in fact I need to hold my line – why? 'Because he who promised is faithful.' God keeps his promises. We're in this for the long haul, and we will get to the finish line. Philippians 1:6 puts it like this: 'he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion on the day of Christ Jesus.'

So don't give up! You may feel under pressure – don't quit. You may have doubts – don't quit. You may find it hard to pray, and every time you read the bible, your mind wanders – don't quit. You may be troubled by the latest church scandal or terrible natural disaster – don't quit. You may be laughed at or sidelined by friends or family who don't share your faith – don't quit. Hold on. The One who promised is faithful.

Finally, the author tells us, holding on is not just a personal thing for us – it's about those around you too, fellow followers of Jesus: '**Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.**' A few weeks ago I talked about the gift of encouragement: and yes, that is a specific gift – but that doesn't mean we don't all do it. We *all* need to be cheering each other on. We are all called to a life of love and good deeds, and we all play a part in helping each other to do that.

The writer particularly reminds us that we need to keep meeting. Christian fellowship is one of the most precious things in the world. (And you're still doing that watching online, and you can do that with phone calls and video calls, even if you can't meet in person.) Like hot coals we go cold on our own – but we stay warm together. We meet to encourage each other and not just to boost our own faith. So, as I close, why not make a small resolution to encourage a fellow believer today, or this week? And maybe someone else will do the same for you too!

By one sacrifice Jesus has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy. This is our reality – may God grant us grace to really believe it, to know that the stain on our hearts really is washed away. And let us draw near to God today, holding on to faith and hope, and resolving to encourage our fellow believers. The One who promised is faithful. Amen.