

25th Sunday after Pentecost
November 17, 2024
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Live Free from the Fear of Judgment
Hebrews 9:24-38 (EHV)

For Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God on our behalf. ²⁵And he did not enter to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise he would have needed to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. ²⁷And, just as it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment, ²⁸so also Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Dear Friends in Christ,

It can happen in sports. The coach may be so demanding of perfection that the players become timid. The coach is going to yell and scream at me if I make a mistake so I'll play it safe and not take any risks. I am so afraid of getting benched that I play so conservatively that another player ends up taking my place. Something similar can happen in workplaces. The boss expects perfection and is prone to outbursts of anger when something is not done to his or her expectations. Employees fear going into work each day because they don't know what the boss is going to be angry about today. Work efficiency is going to suffer in such a fearful environment. Creativity and risk taking to improve the business is going to suffer under a leader who causes the employees to live and work in fear.

Living in fear of judgment from a coach or boss is not a good way to live and generally does not produce good results. What about living in fear of God's judgment? We need to avoid the extremes when we think about the fear of God. One extreme would be to ignore the fact that we will face judgment and therefore live any way we want. The other extreme would be to live in constant fear of God's judgment and therefore not really live the life God has set before us. So, yes, we will face judgment one day. But we are able to live free from the fear of judgment because of Christ.

The inspired author of Hebrews makes the first part clear when he writes: *It is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment...*

Almost everyone in the world and almost every religious philosophy believes in some kind of final judgment. The Bible backs up this belief that we have by nature with the written Word of God. There will be a day of judgment and it will happen when you die. To live in ignorance of this judgment is dangerous. Those who live without any thought of standing before God to be judged may live only for themselves. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die. Have all the fun and pleasure you can because there is nothing after one dies.

We may not have that attitude completely, but we may think we can avoid thinking about that day of judgment because we have many more years of life. We're not old enough to be thinking about the day of our death and judgment. I can live how I want now until I get old and have to start thinking about facing God for judgment. To a 20 something, 40 is old. To a 40 something, 60 is old, to a 60 something, well, you get the picture. Our sinful nature always thinks there will be time later to consider judgment and to get things set straight before that day.

Martin Luther and others in his time, some 500 years ago, did not have the luxury of thinking death and the day of judgment would come much later in life. People died young and often at that time. Children died from various diseases. Luther had friends die when he was in school.

Mothers died in childbirth. Plagues took the lives of a quarter of your village. Luther lived with the very real possibility that he would soon face judgment. And for the first decades of his life, he lived in terrible fear of that day. He was so frightened of God's judgment that he even writes about hating God. He was on the other extreme. Instead of living as though judgment would never happen, he was living every day as though God would condemn him.

The Holy Spirit through the letter to the Hebrews gives us a middle path on which to walk between these extremes. We are to remember that the day of judgment will come for every person. However, we are to live free from the fear of judgment. How can we do that? By believing what the author of Hebrews tells us.

For Christ did not enter a handmade sanctuary, a representation of the true sanctuary. Instead, he entered into heaven itself, now to appear before God on our behalf. ²⁵And he did not enter to offer himself many times, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise he would have needed to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once and for all, at the climax of the ages, in order to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

The children of Israel in the Old Testament had a wonderful object lesson in their midst. The tabernacle and later the temple were representations of heaven, the place where God's people dwell with God. However, in these representative places on earth, only the priests could enter. The priests would go into the Holy Place on a daily basis to offer prayers, light the candles, and burn incense. Outside on a daily basis, sacrifices would be made to give thanks to God, to atone for sin, and to express dedication to the Lord their God. Only once a year would anyone enter the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant was kept. Only the high priest would enter this place and only on the Day of Atonement and only when he brought the blood of a bull and a goat to atone for his sins and the sins of the people. All this was to teach and assure the people that God forgives their sins and that he is still with them. But they kept doing the same things day after day and year after year because all of these things were shadows of the Savior to come.

Jesus fulfills all of these pictures so that these priestly activities and sacrifices no longer have to be repeated. Jesus did not only go to the temple in Jerusalem to atone for our sins, he went into heaven to do so. He stands before his Father as our great High Priest to plead for our forgiveness. Jesus, the one and only Son of God, offers his own blood to cover our sins. His holy, precious blood is sufficient payment to cover the sin of the world. His one-time sacrifice put an end to the need for any more sacrifices. When Jesus said, "It is finished" upon the cross, he meant it. No more daily sacrifices at the temple. No more annual Day's of Atonement needed. No more fear of judgment because all sin has been paid for, all guilt has been atoned.

So, what will the Judge say on the day you stand before him? Will he bring up all the sinful words that came from your lips, all the rebellious actions of your life, all the wicked thoughts of your mind? Will he bring witnesses before him to testify about your transgressions? Will he scold you and say how disappointed he is with you? Will he condemn you to eternal death? You know the answer. We gather here each Sunday to hear God's answer in the absolution. We gather around God's inspired Word to hear the certain and comforting truth. We gather to receive the Lord's Supper for the assurance of what the Son of God will say to us on the day of our judgment.

The Judge is Jesus Christ himself. You know what he is going to say. For he has forgiven your sins and remembers them no more. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. No punishment remains for us. You have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. For God did not send him Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.

Through the temple and the sacrifices, God's people in the Old Testament had a picture of what Christ was going to do to save them. We get to rejoice in Christ's completed work and now we

have a picture of what Christ will do when he returns and we stand before him for judgment. It will be a great day for all believers.

Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.

Redeemed children of God, eagerly wait for Christ to bring you to eternal salvation in heaven. This eager waiting is living our Christian life without fear of judgment. God hasn't given us a checklist of things to complete before he will let us into heaven. He simply puts opportunities to love God and love others in front of us each day. Our Savior is sitting at the right hand of his Father in heaven in order to yell at us for doing something wrong. He is not keeping track of our sins so he can scold us. He is watching over all things to get us through this life in faith so he can welcome us into the real, heavenly temple of God forever.

In the early years of Martin Luther's life, he pictured God as an angry judge, ready to condemn him to hell. This drove Luther to give 110% effort to do what God demanded. He did everything he was told to do and more to avoid judgment from God. This kind of fear can make a person behave a certain way. But when the Holy Spirit revealed the truth about Christ to Luther, a different kind of work resulted. When Luther became convinced that Christ was smiling upon him, had forgiven him, and had given him freely the gift of eternal life, Luther's life changed. It was not all focused on saving himself. Instead, he worked for others. He served others by teaching and preaching and writing. His focus became outward instead of inward. This is the freedom of the gospel. This is the freedom we can live with since we know what Christ will say on the day of our judgment. Therefore, think of the smiling face of your Savior as you go about your days on earth.

Amen.