

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd

Austin, Texas

The Rev. Deacon Chris Duncan

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Proper 28 (Year B), Hebrews 10:11-25

Open our lips, O Lord, and our mouths shall proclaim your praise. Amen

Good Morning!

Larry was a man with dreams. His biggest dream was to fly but due to his poor eye sight he was left grounded when he joined the Air Force. Many times our dreams lead to wonderful discoveries and accomplishments, but in Larry's case they led to obsession, delusion, and foolishness. While sitting in his backyard in the Los Angeles area in what was quote "an extremely comfortable" lawn chair, Larry had what can only be described as an idiotic idea. He quickly set out to purchase several weather balloons, filled them with helium, and securely attached them to his "extremely comfortable" lawn chair. The plan was to go like this: With cooler filled with drinks and food in lap, Larry would cut the anchor rope thus gently ascend to about 30 feet where a tether would safely and securely catch him and thus allow him to lazily float about in the sky. After a few hours of relaxing with the birds, Larry would use a pellet gun to pop one balloon at a time until he slowly and safely descended back to the ground.

Things did not work out as Larry planned. When his anchor rope was cut, the lawn chair did not gently float into the air, but rather shot up as if from a cannon. When Larry reached the height of 30 feet, the tether did not catch him but rather snapped and fell to ground while Larry continued to shoot into the sky. He did not level off at 100 feet, nor did he level off at 1000 feet. Rather after climbing and climbing and climbing, reports say that Larry finally stopped ascending at around 16,000 feet. And so Larry began to drift cold and frightened. To make a bad situation worse, Larry was blown by the wind into the primary approach corridor of the Los Angeles airport known as LAX. One pilot is reported as radioing in the incident claiming in disbelief he just saw a man float by with a gun in a lawn chair. After four and a half hours, Larry gathered the nerve to shoot a few balloons that allowed him and his lawn chair to descend. Upon arriving back on the ground, Larry was promptly arrested by waiting LAPD and as you can imagine, the FAA was not amused either. A Safety Inspector on hand is quoted as saying, "We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act, and as soon as we decide which part it is, a charge will be filed."

As Larry was led away in handcuffs, a reporter dispatched to cover the rescue and subsequent arrest asked Larry why he had done it. Larry replied nonchalantly, "A man can't just sit around."

As absolutely absurd as this is, Larry was on to something. He was right on one thing: a person can't just sit around. Yes, there are better things to do with our time than concoct and follow through with crazy ideas, but by our very nature we are not passive.

And just as we are not passive beings, in a similar way, the church is not passive. The Church being the hands and feet of Christ is called to action. We should not act irrationally, but nonetheless... we can't just sit around.

In today's reading from Hebrews, we find a church in decline, a church just passively sitting around. "The audience, members of the church's 'second generation' (2.3), had experienced persecution and had perhaps become disappointed that God's promised kingdom had not yet come (at least come according to how they thought it should). Some members may even have begun to abandon the community."¹ It appears the congregation suffers from waning zeal and a decline in worship. And so Hebrews carries with it elements of a teaching sermon within this letter... an epistle-sermon so to say to a community in need of being re-energized by the good news of the Gospel all over again.

What does the author of Hebrews use to re-inspire the people? A fancy gimmick? A catchy slogan? A new branding campaign perhaps? No... He returns to the basic elements of our faith: our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Hebrews has now spent more than three chapters explaining how Christ is the great High Priest who has permanently pardoned our sins by his actions. Verses 16 through 18 in today's reading remind us what the prophet Jeremiah said about the New Covenant. It says, "'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts and I will write them on their minds,' he also adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.' Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin."

The author is inspiring the reader by reminding them of all that Christ has done on our behalf. You might say that the war has been won, but the battles rage on. Christ has claimed victory but we still fight on in a broken world. Think about D-Day in WWII. That battle for all intensive purposes won the war on the European front, but there were still battles to be fought afterwards. The author of Hebrews is saying that Christ's action is complete and for all us but we as believers must keep moving forward for the kingdom of God.

So we are left with this question: how shall we live? After all, as Larry so aptly put it... we can't just sit around. It is with confidence in Christ that the author of Hebrews calls the community to action through faith, hope, and love. As today's reading states, "Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering... and let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another..."

It is with that same confidence in Christ's feat on the cross and Christ's work in our lives today that we are called to action through faith, hope, and love as presented in Hebrews. Yes, we are a different church in a different time, but these words speak truth to us. It is our faith, hope, and love that leads to actions... actions that change the world

¹ Attridge, Harold. "The Letter to the Hebrews", *Harper Collins Study Bible*. p. 2251.

for the Kingdom of God. The Book of Common Prayer Catechism says that we are “to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever we may be; and, according to the gifts given, to carry on Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take our place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.”² In other words, we all serve as ministers in the church.

At a friend’s church in East Texas, the priest once stood before the congregation for announcements and to welcome their guests. He wanted to point out the hosts or greeters of the day, but no one in the congregation answered the priest’s inquiry when he asked for the greeters to stand. After an awkward pause, my friend answered, “Aren’t we **all** the greeters and hosts?”

It is this type of call to action that we are given. Aren’t we all greeters and hosts? Aren’t we all ministers in some way? We each have a part in ministry in the world, and here at Good Shepherd. We are each hosts, Christian Education teachers, and pastoral care givers. We are each children, youth, and adult ministers. We are each ministers of outreach and mission. We are each signers with the choir. We are all ministers of the church and called to serve. And we each live that out in different and unique ways according to our gifts.

As we approach the end of our church year with Advent around the corner, we prepare to leave behind us the season after Pentecost. This season has been one marked with hearing Jesus’ life and ministry, healing and teaching. And so now inspired and forever changed by our Great High Priest, we continue that good work in the world by sharing the kingdom of God.

“Let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith... let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering... and let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another...” Are we willing to answer this call? That is our daily challenge and sometimes it presents itself in new, unique ways. We are called to continue, to increase, or for the first time be active ministers of the church in a world desperately needing faith, hope, and love. After all, we can’t just sit around.

² BCP, 855