

Hebrews 10:11-25

November 7, 2015 + Service of Prayer and Preaching
Doxology Encore + Chiara Center, Springfield, Illinois
Pastor Tim Pauls
Another Day

In the name of Jesus. Amen

A couple of years back, we were suddenly faced with the need to get our older son to pass the APFT—the Army Physical Fitness Test, so we did what we do as parents. My wife found a cross-fit gym a couple miles from the house; and for the entire school year, the three of us would get up at 4:30 and work out from 5:00-6:00 a.m. *In the morning.*

Here's the thing about cross-fit: it preaches law unceasingly. It always accuses. You can always lift more, no matter how much you lift. You can always run faster, no matter how fast you run. You can always do better, no matter how well you've done. Take a day off and you're going backwards, no matter how many days you've put in. And if you're in your late forties, you'll always get beat by most of the other people, no matter how ruggedly handsome you are.

Our instructor was a former force-recon Marine, a veteran of Fallujah and a motivational speaker who would introduce most workouts with inspirational speeches like, "This will hurt." He proved to be an honest man, though not a happy one; and if you ever asked him how he was doing, his response was always the same: "Another day."

Another day. Just like the day before, just like the day after. There was a futility to those words, as if nothing was ever going to change, as if you had to put your all into the day just to keep from going backwards. But if nothing's ever going to change, you're really just waiting to die.

Another day. "Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins." That was the life of the priest at the temple: another day, another lamb. Another throat cut, more blood spilled, carcass burnt, law fulfilled. Day after day, year after year, lamb after lamb, bull after bull. If the priests lost sight of the promised Messiah who was attached to these sacrifices, I can't imagine attending to the grueling, gruesome and boring task of making these offerings day after day, lamb after lamb. The work was never done, and no progress was made for a simple reason: those sacrifices could never take away sins. With sins not taken away, they were still on the outside of the temple, spattered in blood and death by an altar. They were still far away from the Most High God dwelling behind the curtain in the Most Holy Place.

Another day, another lamb. There are times in the ministry when the day feels like just another day. For several industries, Boise is a stop on the way to bigger things, so I've met quite a few men who are in town for a few years until the next promotion comes along. They're going places. Likewise, I've known old men who escaped the Dust Bowl and Great Depression, then made a prosperous life for themselves and their kids. Good for them! My point is that men measure their worth by progress, but it's not like that for pastors. Twenty years ago, my week consisted of writing sermons and visiting shut-ins. After all those years, my week consists mostly of...writing sermons and visiting shut-ins. It's what pastors do—the same old thing. You pastors have had at least eight years of post-high school education; you are quite honestly some of the most educated men in America. And since you know the Gospel, you are some of the wisest men in America. And there you are on a Tuesday afternoon, sitting with someone homebound on the same sofa hearing the same story for the umpteenth time. No wonder a day can feel like just another day.

The temptation is similar for parishioners and lay leaders. This is America: we measure things by growth and things that are new and improved, so the temptation is to apply that template to the church. When church seems the same day after day or year after year, and when those practices don't seem to be contributing to growth and success, the temptation grows strong to believe that the church is doing something wrong. But the Lord doesn't call His Church to progress and innovation. He calls it to faithfulness. Faithfulness is actually a far more challenging task: in a world that is constantly moving—and constantly moving away from the Lord, faithfulness means standing firm on Christ and resisting the hell-bound pull of everything around. Sometimes, the harvest is great and even the numbers proclaim success; sometimes, the wheat is choked by birds and thorns and rocky soil. But the people of God are to remain faithful.

That's an exhausting task, day after day. There is always more to do, and you can always do what you do better. In other words, call documents, church constitutions, strategic plans and mission statements all preach the law, and the law always accuses. So here's the next big dangerous temptation for pastors and parishioners both as the weariness mounts: you start to think, "If I can just do a little bit more, work a little bit harder and smarter...maybe that will bring some life."

It will not, and here is why: all of your labors, all of your offerings and all of your sacrifices can never take away sins. Just like all those lambs at the temple, day after day.

Christ can, and thankfully our reading has more than one verse. It goes on with such Good News! Christ has offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, yours included. It is done! And "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet."

There you go. Christ has died and Christ is risen. Christ is ascended, and Christ is coming again. But He is not idle in the meantime. He who has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified sends forth His Holy Spirit. By the work of that Holy Spirit, He puts His laws in the hearts of His people and writes them on their minds. He declares to them, "I remember your sins and your lawless deeds no more." All those daily, same sacrifices of old could never take away sins. Now, day after day, the Lord pours out forgiveness upon His people.

It's not a disembodied voice from on high. This is your joy and this is your calling. He uses your mouth to speak His Word and declare His praise. And with that Word of forgiveness, He pours out all of His gifts. His people have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, given and shed for them for the forgiveness of their sins. They have a High Priest who has made *and* been the Sacrifice. Day after day, they're assaulted by sin, death and devil. But the people of God are not living futile lives and just waiting to die. Day after day in Christ, they have the full assurance of faith, hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and the confidence of bodies washed with pure water. That is the work of the Holy Ministry, to speak the Word that does that saving work. Day after day.

And so, especially for the ordained knuckleheads among us, let us make clear: you are numbered among the people of God. It's by His holy Word that He forgives your sins, cleanses your conscience and grants you the full assurance—the glad certainty—of faith in Christ. Pastors and lay leaders both, it's not your work and labor to exhaustion that sustains the Church, so repent of believing that it is. In that repentance you will find a greatly-relieved conscience and, I think, a newfound joy.

Oh, one and all, rejoice this day. For this is not just another day. It is a day of Christ's gracious visitation, as He prepares you for the day that is like no other: "the Day is drawing

near," our text proclaims. Christ is coming again. Therefore by His grace, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another," day after day, until *that* Day.

In the name of Jesus. Amen