



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

Sermon for Pentecost 22

October 20, 2024

Throne of Grace

Hebrews 4:1–16

¹Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. ²For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. ³For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. ⁴For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.” ⁵And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.” ⁶Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, ⁷again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” ⁸For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. ⁹So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

¹¹Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. ¹²For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. ¹³And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

In today’s Epistle, God urges us to come with confidence before the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and grace to help in time of need. Times of need arise in all sorts of circumstances: periods of financial instability, societal stress, emotional turmoil. With an erratic economy and an upcoming hotly disputed national election, there’s plenty of emotional turmoil to go around, is there not? But perhaps our greatest emotional upheaval presents itself at the loss of a loved one. We cannot yet go where they have gone; we must carry on without them. And there are no easy answers or solutions. Some things must simply be endured.

Because of Christ, death has lost its sting, but it is not bereft of all its bite. It still hurts.



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Our Lord said: “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.” He did not say they will not mourn. The comfort He promises is in the future: “They *shall be* comforted.” But that is then, not now. *Then* – at the great reunion, when all in Christ who have been separated by death are reunited in Him – *then* we shall be comforted, for that which pains us will be brought to an end, the wound will be healed, the breach finally sealed.

This is not to say that there is no comfort now. There is. It’s just incomplete. We have comfort, but we also have mourning. We grieve at lost opportunities, irreparable mistakes, an immutable past. Too late to mend broken fences. Too late to say the things we should have said. Too late to undo things we’ve done. Regret is a hard thing to live with. History is merciless and unyielding.

But our Savior is not. For those who have departed in the Faith, He has healed their side of the equation. They are not in need. They suffer no regret. They are comforted and satisfied. There is no crying in heaven. Why? Because they are in the presence Him who is always faithful, always loving, always kind. He created them, chose them to be His own, bought them with His own blood, named them in Holy Baptism, spoke to them in His Holy Word, fed them with His Holy Supper, and now He has perfected them in every way. They are where they belong, where they have always belonged. They are home.

Your intentions toward them were not always pure, but He has always loved them. He always wanted what was best for them. He never forgot or abandoned them, though at times, for their own good He did ask them to suffer and endure, just as He asks you to suffer and endure. But for them that suffering has come to an end. And they now know what they were baptized into: the life of Jesus Christ, who was crucified and raised to make them His forever.

Yet, here we remain in a world that largely does not know Him, in a culture that, for the most part, does not even acknowledge Him, except to blaspheme Him and to persecute those who do know and love Him. Like history itself, today’s society is, to a great extent, merciless and unyielding.

Indeed, you’ll be hard pressed to find mercy anywhere in this world, and that includes the church. Few people are more judgmental than church people. We, who have forgiveness as our currency, spend it very sparingly. We treat it as a precious commodity, as though we need to save it for a rainy day. But nothing will expand the Church’s economy of grace more, and more quickly, than if we were to spend our currency of forgiveness as though we had it in unending supply. And do you know? We *do*! We have forgiveness in unending supply, we have grace in unending supply, we have mercy in unending supply!

For mercy and forgiveness are precisely what we find at the throne of grace. For that throne is cruciform – in the shape of a cross. Jesus Christ hung upon that throne of grace, nails in His hands and feet, bleeding to be our God, dying to be our friend, blessing us with



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His very life to spare us the tortures and pains of hell, and rising from the dead to inaugurate our own resurrection. He has ascended to the Father to open heaven for us. He stands there now as our Advocate, our own High Priest, our sympathetic Champion, pointing to His scars on our behalf.

This is the comfort He provides us in this often unbearable world, this peaceless, hopeless, lifeless world. For His death was the death of death and the birth of life. He has opened heaven and paved the way for us. For He loves us, despite our sins and dark misdeeds. He loves us and has paid the price for us. He has satisfied the wrath of God, discharged every demand that Justice made, emptied the Law of all accusations, and crushed the head of the old evil foe for us. He freely forgives us, freely reconciles us to the Father, freely bestows on us His Holy Spirit, and freely receives us as His own.

That is the confession made by all true Christians. We are not perfect. But neither do we have to be, because Jesus is perfect for us. Our sins He removed. Our place on the cross He took, the fury of hell we deserve He suffered, so that we would be spared. Now awaiting us is the reward of the righteous, the result of our faith and trust in Christ. He will one day perfect the good work He began in us. And our faith will blossom into a flower whose beauty the world cannot contain.

Let the assurance of the resurrection be your comfort, beloved. May it encourage you in your suffering here on earth. For the Word of God is living and powerful. He does not lie. He did not die in vain. He loves you. With confidence, then, draw near to His throne of grace, and you will receive mercy and find grace to help in every time of need. Glory be to God! In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen