



[Rev. Steven S. Billings](#)

**Sermon for Pentecost 26**

November 17, 2024

# Let Us Draw Near... To Where?

## Hebrews 10:11-25

<sup>11</sup>Every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup>But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, <sup>13</sup>waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. <sup>14</sup>For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

<sup>15</sup>And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying,

<sup>16</sup>“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord:  
I will put my laws on their hearts,  
and write them on their minds,”

<sup>17</sup>then he adds,

“I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.”

<sup>18</sup>Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup>not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

God’s gifts of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion make His Scriptures easier to understand. This is especially true of the Letter to the Hebrews, most especially of the words in today’s Epistle, “Let us *draw near* to God.” Drawing near to God is a recurring theme throughout the Book of Hebrews.

Today’s Epistle, for example, echoes what was written earlier in Hebrews chapter 4: “Let us *draw near* to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).



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Again, in chapter 7, “Through hope we *draw near* to God” (7:19). “[Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who *draw near* to God through Him” (7:25).

And, from chapter 11, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would *draw near* to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him” (11:6).

What becomes clear to us as we read this letter is that you and I need God’s gift of faith (11:6) and hope (7:19) and even a “true heart” in order to “draw near to Him.” But that’s a little bit like saying, “I have the pickaxe and the shovel, so I’m ready to dig up the treasure.” Having the tools is good. But what about the map? The passages I just quoted for you give us the tools to draw near to God, but they don’t give much direction as to where God actually is, how we go about drawing near to Him, or how we will know that we’ve arrived.

Now, to be fair, there are plenty of other places in the Book of Hebrews that speak about where God is, but these passages only seem to make it more difficult to “draw near.” Where is our God, according to Hebrews? Seemingly, far away, for it says:

“After making purification for sins, [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (1:3) where “God has put everything in subjection under His feet” (2:8).

“We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God” (4:14).

“Christ did not enter holy places made with hands... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God” (9:24).

All of these passages, and others like them, make our God sound very far away, which seems to make the question more complicated. What does it even mean that we should “draw near to God?” And how do we actually do that?

Many years ago, when I taught private music lessons, I had one young fellow who couldn’t keep rhythm at all. I kept saying, “Count!” One day, he finally asked me, nearly in a fit of frustration, “How?” Well, if I tell you to draw near to God, you might well ask me, “How?” When the writer to the Hebrews directs you to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” You may well want to ask him, “How?” How do we draw near to God?

It would be ridiculous to suggest that we could build a ladder or a tower that could bring us “through the heavens” (4:14) to the “throne of grace” (4:16). The people at Babel tried that and it didn’t go so well for them; they incurred God’s judgment against them (Genesis 11). We should also bear in mind that we’ve launched hundreds, if not thousands, of satellites and rockets into space, and not one of them has ever crashed into heaven. So a ladder or a tower wouldn’t work, anyway.



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Now, there are some who would tell me that I'm being deliberately recalcitrant with the whole ladder and tower idea. They'd say that our "drawing near to God" must be a spiritual activity, something done "in our hearts." After all, today's Epistle does say, "Let us draw near with a true heart," does it not? Drawing near to God with a pure heart, that is to say, spiritually, is very good, but it's just as problematic as the idea of using a ladder. After all, how can I make *my* faith, or *my* spirit, rise above *me*? For that matter, how can I tell the difference between spiritually drawing near to God and simply imagining that I'm drawing near to God? Even if I could spiritually travel to "the throne of grace," like John was carried in the spirit into the very courtroom of heaven, how would I know when I'd spiritually arrived? What's the difference between a vision and a dream? I don't know. I don't mean to sound glib, but I can go to church, listen to a hymn, or say a prayer and tell myself that now I'm spiritually closer to Jesus — and the guy who spends his Sunday morning on the golf course or in a boat with a fishing pole can make the same claim. Just because we say it, doesn't mean it's true.

As I said at the beginning: God's gifts of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion make His Scriptures easier to understand.

The Letter to the Hebrews makes our resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus sound as though He were very far away. But Holy Communion teaches us to believe that the "far-away" Jesus has actually drawn quite near to us — as near as the bread and wine that are His body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins. Holy Communion enables us to see that drawing near to God, as today's Epistle instructs us, is as simple as these Words, "Take and eat."

Drawing near to God, then, is based on the reality that God has first drawn near to us, and continues to do so. That was the point of John the Baptist's preaching, who spoke about the arrival of Christ by saying, "The kingdom of heaven is near" (Matthew 3:2). The twelve apostles were given the same sermon to preach concerning Jesus, that the "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9). The writer to the Hebrews as well wants us to know that heaven is already in our midst, as he says in chapter 12:

"You have come [you have drawn near] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:22-24).

All of this falls into place when we allow God's gifts of Holy Baptism and Holy Communion to explain Holy Scripture. Do you want to be nearer to God—nearer to His mercy, His forgiveness, His strength? Even more so, do you want to be certain of your



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nearness? Then come to Holy Communion! As you heard the writer say, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Look at that! Today’s Epistle not only calls us to “draw near” to our almighty God and His throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16), but it also explains how we may do so without fear: “in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” If that’s not a reference to Holy Baptism, I don’t know what it is!

In Holy Baptism, your body was miraculously washed with pure water. This washing of your body is not the sort that is done with soap or shampoo, but is carried out with the Word of God joined to the water. Put another way, when your sins were washed away in Holy Baptism (Acts 22:16), the hope and the certainty of the resurrection were washed into you.

In Holy Baptism, our bodies were sprinkled clean from an evil conscience. That means you have nothing to fear from God. The Lord your God sees all things and He sees everything inside you—including and especially the things that burden your conscience. What does God in particular see in you? He sees that Holy Baptism has sprinkled your conscience clean, even though you still feel like it’s dirty. It’s as simple as this: God sees things differently. He sees things in ways that you can’t.

Holy Baptism is the “sprinkling” and “cleansing” that makes you worthy to “draw near” to God in Holy Communion, that you may gather with the saints at the altar of God to eat and drink the body and blood of our Lord, and that you may do so in “full assurance of faith,” without condemnation, without doubt, without fear, without half-hearted devotion. We draw near with sprinkled consciences and cleansed bodies. By the power of Holy Baptism we draw near to the power of Holy Communion, which opens to us a better understanding of God’s Holy Word. And that’s how we draw near to God. In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen