

**The Last Judgment – November 11, 2012
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

Pastor Charles Heup

Hebrews 10:23-25

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Dear fellow members of God's family:

It's the final seconds of the fourth quarter. The underdog team has come from behind and is leading the football game by a single point. They've held their opponent for the last three downs and now it's fourth down. One more play to go and sweet victory will be theirs. A time out has been called and the coaches are huddling with their team – hang on. Don't give up hope. That's the message both coaches want to share with their teams. The underdog will be encouraged to hang on to the hope that they will be able to hold off the opposition for one more play. The trailing team will be encouraged to hang on to the hope that made them the odds on favorite to win. All it takes is one big play and they've done it before.

As the teams take to the field once again the crowd comes to life. "Hold em' hold'em. Take it to'em take it to em. Take to em now!" The crowd chants. Let's go we can do it the players shout to each other. The ball is snapped, its down and the kick is ...

You know what. I'm going to let you pick the ending. You can decide for yourself is the kick is blocked or good – whether the underdog wins or loses. It doesn't matter really for the purposes of my illustration. I simply wanted to catch your attention and to get you thinking about the excitement of living as a Christian in the end times.

Now in a very real sense you and I were spiritual underdogs! There was absolutely no hope for us all until our loving Lord entered into our world. He went to bat for us – perfectly keeping each and every aspect of God's will. And then he willingly allowed the guilt of our sins to be placed on his innocent shoulders and he suffered the hell we deserved – dying on the cross for our sins. With his victory over sin, over death and even over the grave Jesus assures us of a place in the winners circle. OK I know I'm mixing up my sports metaphors a bit but I'm a pastor not a sportscaster! I'm simply trying to impress upon you that we are living in the last times and that Jesus has given us the hope of everlasting life.

In baptism we have been cleansed from our sins and joined to Christ. Now we are sons of God who have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and are able to knock on our heavenly Father's door – at any time and confidently crawl up on his lap with all of our needs and concerns. And surely as we consider the fact that we are living in the last times with all the many challenges to our faith and the many struggles we face as believers in an unbelieving world we will want to draw near to God as the writer of our text encouraged just a few verses before the words of this text.

There might be the temptation to let down and to try to coast our way into heaven – but that's not the will of our loving Lord. He wants us to be active until the end. Martin Luther caught the sense of the Lord's will for those living in the end times when he said, "If I knew for sure that the Lord was coming tomorrow I'd plant an apple tree today." His point was that we will want to serve the Lord with our lives here as long as we

have the chance until we are privileged to serve him in eternity. Today's text has lots to say to us about living in the end times.

Theme: We are living in the end times.

1. Hang on to your hope in Christ
2. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds
3. Encourage each other as you continue to gather together

1. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Keep on hanging on the writer of our text encourages. Don't stop. Don't be turned aside. It's interesting that we're not encouraged to keep holding on to our faith but to the hope we have in Christ. With these words our text lifts our eyes away from ourselves, away from the difficulties of this life, the temptations of this world, the tragic and frightening events of the end times and holds before us the vision of glory waiting for us because of Christ. From Christ comes not only pardon for our sins in the present, but glorious hope for the future. Heaven is our sure home – the victory is ours for he who promised is faithful.

Nothing can strengthen our hope of heaven more than God's faithfulness. He never changes his mind and he can not lie. The one who sacrificed his Son will not go back on his Word to us. We have been promised the crown of glory and our Lord himself will see to it that it is placed on our heads. These promises made to us for Christ's sake are the foundations of our hope for the future.

Because of God's faithfulness we can boast about our hope – it's not some secret wish that we have to hide for fear that we'll be embarrassed if it doesn't come to pass. We can hold our hope high for all to see – never letting it droop or fall to the ground no matter how doubtful the outcome might appear to be for us. Our hope is as certain and sure the unfailing Word of the Lord

That's why we can profess or proclaim this hope. Years ago Joe Namath professed his hope of winning the Super Bowl. In fact he guaranteed that his underdog New York Jets would defeat the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III. Scoffers laughed but much to the surprise of almost everyone Joe led his team to a 16-7 victory. We can confidently put our hope on display because our hope is meant for all the world to see. Peter encourages us: (1 Peter 3:15) **But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.**

Often confession brings bumps and bruises, sometimes worse as the Hebrew Christians knew all too well. But the world's opposition cannot affect our hope. It may hurt our hold on and hinder our confession of it but it cannot harm the hope itself. Opposition to Christ and the hope he offers is alive and well in our modern society too. Yet the world needs to hear of the wonderful promises of salvation in Christ now more than ever.

As brothers and sisters in Christ we need to encourage one another with that hope and we need to encourage each other to share that hope. When we see one of our fellow Christians stumbling under the load and struggling to hang on to hope in Christ we need to go into action.

Our text encourages us to **consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.** None of us lives in isolation. Our words, our actions, our attitudes have an effect on others. That's why it's important for us to stop and to pay attention to how we can spur each other on toward love and good deeds.

How can we help others to love the unlovable and the undeserving by perceiving their needs and then by going into action? That's the kind of love our text is talking about. It's often called *agape* love by Christians

since that's the Greek word which is used in this text. It's the same kind of love that Jesus showed to us. 1 John 4:10 points to a perfect example of this kind of love: (1 John 4:10) **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.**

Our love comes from God's divine love. The practice of love always involves others. It also involves good deeds. When love is present it shows it self in deeds which benefit others. Faith and love must be present in order for those deeds to be pleasing in God's sight.

As members of a Christian congregation the Lord has brought us together for our mutual benefit...so that we can spur each other on toward love and good works. The Lord knows how easy it is for us to get lazy, to balk at carrying out his will, to give in to the temptation to hoard the gospel for ourselves. We live in an age in which the motto, me first and I'm # one are still prevalent. The words, "I", "me," "my" and "mine," are way too commonly used to express the concerns of most people. One of the more difficult words for newly weds to say with meaning is the word ours – It's not easy to think of everything we have as belonging to someone else. It's not easy to share everything we have with others but isn't that exactly what the Lord asks of us not only in our marriage relationships but in our dealings with each other too?

If you had Bibles here this morning I'd ask you to open them to Philippians 2:1-8 where Paul says: **If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2) then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.**

It's clear from the Scriptures that Christians need each other – that's what member ministry is all about – helping each other to hang on to the hope we have in Christ, helping to spur each other on to works of love and good deeds, sacrificing what is ours for the sake of others. But how do we go about encouraging and urging each other on especially in light of the fact that the end is near? Our text provides an answer. **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

It's easy to fall into the habit of neglecting gathering together with our Christian family. That's why our text urges, **"Let's not give up meeting together."** Believers need to gather together around the Word and Sacrament. They need to gather for worship to be strengthened and to give strength. Believers gather for worship not just for the selfish reason of gaining something for themselves, but also to give praise to the Lord and to give encouragement to others. It may be true that you can praise God without coming together with fellow believers. It may be true that you can be strengthened as you use the Word privately. But there is no way that we can sit home alone with the radio or TV preacher or our devotional books and be an encouragement to others. Just like charcoal briquettes glowing together, we need each other as Christians to keep our faith glowing brightly and our hopes alive.

Some of the Hebrew Christians had already deserted the gatherings of believers. Maybe they were afraid of persecution but that only meant that they would have to stand alone in the face of persecution and it would be more likely that they would end up losing their faith. It's a dangerous proposition to think that we can stand alone as Christians. That's why it's important for us to continue to lovingly watch for signs that our brothers and sisters are falling into the habit of not meeting together and to lovingly offer them encouragement.

Our text tells us to continue to encourage one another. To encourage means to stand beside or with someone. It does not mean to lecture or criticize in a condemning way. It doesn't mean putting someone down. It does mean standing sympathetically with them, being willing to listen to their concerns or fears in an effort to

help them and to assist them. Standing along side each other in love and working together to support each other and to uphold each and to jointly resist persecution are preferable to standing alone and refusing to meet together with each other over selfish or petty issues. Giving and receiving strength when tempted, urging and being urged when wavering, comforting and being comforted in sorrow are among some of the many pluses to be found in gathering around the Word.

If this encouragement was appropriate for the Hebrew Christians some 1900 plus years ago surely it is even more appropriate for us who are even close to the Day of the Lord's return.

Bearing with each other in weakness, forgiving each other for Christ's sake, encouraging each other to hang on to the hope we have in Christ, spurring each on toward love and good deeds and continuing to meet together in worship are some of the themes which are appropriately used in describing the ministry we have toward our fellow members. We're living in the end times – the victory is ours because of Christ and yet Satan is trying to steal it from us and others. Now is not the time to sit on our hands. It's not the time to back away from the Lord and his Word or from the family of believers. Now is the time to stand together, to work together, to grow together, to love each other and to encourage each other.

We don't know how much longer the Lord will allow us to work for him and with our fellow Christians but we do know the Day of his coming is drawing closer. We are living in the end times of our lives and possibly of the world therefore:

1. Hang on to your hope in Christ
2. Spur one another on toward love and good deeds
3. Encourage each other as you continue to gather together

Amen.