**Access to God by the Flesh of Jesus**

Based on [Hebrews 10:11-25](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Heb10.11-25) - [Mark 13:1-13](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Mk13.1-13)

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Pentecost 25, Proper 28

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"**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith**." (Hebrews 10:19-20, 22)

This second-to-last Sunday of the church year focuses on answering the question, “**what things will endure for eternal life, and what won’t?**” In our Gospel lesson, Jesus teaches his disciples what it will be like in these last days. There will be trials and temptations to abandon the faith that has been handed down from the apostles to you. Temptations will come, but do not be alarmed. Jesus ends his teaching with this promise, “**The one who endures to the end will be saved**.”

Anytime we hear a promise in the bible that has to do with being saved, our ears ought to perk up. Because salvation is our heart's desire. To be delivered forever from the hands of our enemies into the everlasting arms of the Lord--that is what we hope and we pray for above all things. And so when God's word speaks of the things that give us this salvation, we listen. Our ears perk up when we hear 1 Peter chapter 3, “Baptism..now saves you.” What saves you? *Baptism*. Acts 4:12 **says, Jesus is the cornerstone and Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**” What saves you? *The Name of Jesus*. Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” What saves you? *God's grace, through faith.*

And today we hear, “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” So what saves you? Endurance in general? No. And here's where we need to be careful, or else we're liable to think that salvation is something we accomplish. In a general sense, everyone will endure to the end. The wars and rumours of wars, the temptations and the trials of these last days, the family betrayals and the false teachings, everyone Christian or no, will have to endure these things. The people of Paris this Friday, both christen and non Christian, suffered these things as 127 people were killed by terrorists. Everyone will endure with these birth pains, go through them, live in the midst of them until Christ comes again. But not everyone will be saved.

All people will face the trials of these last days; but it is those who bear witness to Christ and endure the consequences will be saved. Jesus says, "**Be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them...And you will be hated by all for my name's sake**." And bearing witness to Christ is not your own doing, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the one who is speaking when you speak God's Word. The one who places faith in your heart that can't stay there but comes to your lips, in season and out of season, to bear witness to the Lord of Glory who paid for your sins and gave you eternal life. If someone rescues you from a burning car, you can't help but speak that hero’s praise. How much more, when the Son of God rescues you from the fires of hell, will you bear witness to him.

And yet, we remain sinful. Our hearts so easily chase vain pursuits. We praise the beauty of the world more than the shame of the cross. We praise things made by the hands of men, more that the salvation wrought by the nail-marked hands of God. In our gospel lesson Jesus and his disciples were walking out of the Jerusalem temple, and the disciples praise the building. **And no doubt it was a magnificent structure built by the extravagant King Herod.**  The disciples are living in the moment, reveling in the luxurious beauty of this temple. It was constructed of massive stones piled one upon the other, giving the sense of stability, a structure that will endure. And the surely disciples were thinking, "**surely, this is a temple fit for God himself to dwell in!**" But Jesus, like a splash of cold water to the face says, “**Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down**.” Jesus is saying, “Do you see this grandiose temple that you are putting your hope and trust in, that in my midst you consider worthy of praise?” Jesus says, “It will not last. It will not endure the wrath to come. It will be destroyed.”

St. Paul preaches in Acts 17:24, “**The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man,** nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything…that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. **Yet he is actually not far from each one of us.”** Isn’t it ironic?...the very image of the invisible God, the Lord of heaven and earth, the eternal son of God *in the flesh* **Jesus Christ himself is standing right next to the disciples, and rather than praise him, they choose to praise a man-made pile of stones**. They still didn't get it. Their only access to God is this man Jesus, and without him as its cornerstone, any building is destined to fall.

Once upon a time, the temple in Jerusalem was the place where people accessed God. His throne, the Mercy Seat atop the Ark of the Covenant, that is where God made himself available to his people. **And in that temple there was a curtain that veiled the priests and the people from God's raw unmediated presence**. If a lamp needs a lampshade so the light doesn’t harm our eyes, how much more does the righteous radiance of God need a veil, a curtain so that his glory does not harm us? So the author of Hebrews says, “**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh…let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith**.”

The author of Hebrews says we have "**confidence to enter the holy places.**" What are these holy places? Church buildings? Sure, but not all of them. Holy places are those that offer the flesh and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Or, as our Lutheran Confessions summarize the point..."The Church is the congregation of saints in which the Gospel is purely taught and the sacraments are correctly administered." Wherever this happens, there Jesus is in the flesh, and wherever Jesus is that is a holy place, a place set apart to give us access to his promises.

But someone might say, “**What do you mean we access God through the flesh of Jesus?**” God is everywhere; He is in all things, over all things, and upholds all things by the word of his power (Hebrews 1:3). God can be accessed anywhere, can't he?...anywhere I want? Martin Luther once said, **yes God is everywhere, and he is in everything. God is even in the fire, but if you reach for him there you will be scorched.** God is in the fire, but he's not in the fire for you. He is not in the fire to save you. You will not find salvation in the fire, you will not find forgiveness in nature, you will not find eternal life in a building made by hands. These things you will find in the flesh of Jesus, given and shed for you, delivered to you at this altar, so let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Where is God to be accessed? Not in a building made by men, but as Hebrews says, through the flesh and blood of Jesus. **We have access to God anywhere and everywhere the flesh and blood of Jesus are given--be it in a building made of riverstone, or a funeral home called Cornerstone.--where the flesh of Jesus is, there we have access to him.** And what comfort, because only those who endure to the end will be saved. And that comfort is yours. Without the flesh of Christ none of us could suffer a minute’s persecution. But through the sacrament, he gives us his Holy Spirit that we may bear all crosses, endure all trials, and not be alarmed by find comfort in the chaos of these last days. So Paul says in Philippians, as he is in chains in prision, “**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”** So too you can endure all things through the body and blood of Christ who strengthens you.

There’s one more gospel comfort in Jesus words. Yes these trials will come, but the good news is this...they will not last forever. These trials will come but they will not endure. Jesus says, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away (Mark 13:31). And his are the words of eternal life, that he is risen, ascended and now sits at the right hand of God, “**waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified”** (Hebrews 10:13-14) by his holy body and blood. The present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed on that day (Romans 8:18).