

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 8, 2013

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 382, 120 :5, 220, 223, 655.

Lessons: Amos 5: 6-15, Hebrews 3 : 1-19, John 5: 16-29

Sermon Text: Hebrews 3: 1-6

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

I think you all would admit that there are at least two ways of paying attention to something. One is when you are multi-tasking, that is, trying to do more than one thing at a time. I'm thinking of the way you might pay half-hearted attention to a television program and aren't concentrating on every word that is said, on every nuance of the action, on every bit of the screen. The other way is when you really concentrate on something, and pay attention to the tiniest detail, listening very carefully, trying not to let your mind wander for a moment. We can also read something in either way. We can watch movies and television in either way. We can listen in either way. Sometimes in school we really need to concentrate on every detail. But sometimes in school we just let our minds wander and think we don't need to pay attention. Sometimes at work we think don't need to concentrate on every detail because we may have heard the same thing dozens of times before, or because we think we know exactly how to do what someone is telling us to do. But sometimes at work we really have to fix our eyes on what is happening or what we are being told because it is really critical to get it right the first time, and we have to concentrate so we don't mess up.

Our sermon text begins: *“Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”* Fix your eyes on this. That means, and the words in our text mean “consider this, concentrate on this, think seriously about this”. Look closely at this. Look into this, paying careful attention.”

When you concentrate on something, when you fix your eyes on something, you are paying attention. You are giving it your undivided attention, paying attention as carefully as you can.

JUST LOOK AT OUR HIGH PRIEST!

1. This is addressed to *“holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling.”*
2. *“Fix your thoughts on Jesus.”*
3. He is God's *“apostle and our high priest.”*

Christians are to have this high priest, Jesus Christ, in their thoughts, and to make him the object of their close and serious consideration. Surely no one on earth or heaven deserves our careful consideration more than Jesus Christ.

“Holy brothers”! This is addressed to the brothers of Christ, and in that way also those who are brothers to all the saints in heaven and on earth. The writer is addressing the Holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints, together with all who will listen.

These *“Holy brothers”* are fellow believers in Christ, completely cleansed from sin and consecrated for service by Jesus the high priest. Theirs is a heavenly calling, coming from and ultimately leading to God in heaven. It is a calling they surely would not want to jeopardize. But how is it that anyone is made holy? It is by the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the gospel to hearts of humans so that they believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from all their sins. This is what is called subjective justification.

You “*who share in the heavenly calling,*” partakers of the heavenly calling—partakers of the means of grace, and of the Spirit of grace, that came from heaven, and by which Christians are sanctified, are the ones God is talking to here.

Notice the titles that scripture here gives to Jesus – “*Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*” This is the only place in the New Testament that the word “apostle” is used of Jesus. This word refers to the one who is commissioned for something, who is sent out to do something. God had sent his son as the authorized representative to speak for him and carry out his will. As the apostle of our confession, the leader of the Gospel church, Jesus is the principal messenger sent by God to men with the most important errand and calling that exists.

He is also the high priest of our profession. He has been called the chief officer of the Old Testament as well as the New. He is the head of the church everywhere. High Priest refers to the sacrificial nature of his mission. The priest is the one who leads the sacrifices, and makes the sacrifice for all the others. And the sacrifice is what paid for all our sins. Earlier in this letter to the Hebrews we read: “*he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*” (Hebrews 2:17) On him we depend for pardon of our sins, and for acceptance with God.

As Christ, the Messiah, he was anointed and in every way qualified for the office both of apostle and high priest. Moses pointed forward to Jesus many times as our Savior, our healer, the great physician of souls. Fix your eyes and thoughts on him. Consider what he is in himself, what he is to us, and what he will be to us hereafter and for ever. Fix your thoughts upon him with the greatest attention, for he is the author and finisher of your faith, as we read in Hebrews 12:2: “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*” He is the beginning of our faith, and the one who completes or perfects it.

Close and serious consideration is necessary: careful, constant study of Jesus. The use of the personal name Jesus, meaning Savior, immediately focuses attention on his work on earth, the mission that God became man in order to fulfill.

Especially you, holy brothers, brothers in the faith, partakers of the heavenly calling, you need to stir up one another to think more of Christ. You need to have him more in your minds. Because of sin, his people think of him too seldom and too little. We must consider Christ as he is described to us in the scriptures, and use only that picture of him, not making him to be a god that we choose to imagine and build.

We then hear several arguments – reasons – for looking to Christ and fixing our thoughts on him.

Jesus was faithful to the one who appointed him – his heavenly father – just as was Moses. Moses poured out his life in service to the house of Israel, God’s chosen people in the Old Testament. The comparison is to Moses who was faithful in all his house. Christ is the appointed Mediator. God the Father has sent and sealed him to that office, and because he offered the ultimate sacrifice, his mediation is acceptable to the Father. He is faithful to that appointment. He observed all the laws and commands and statutes his father commanded. He fully executed the trust placed in him by his Father and by his people. He is as faithful to the one who appointed him as Moses was in all his doings before God. Moses was faithful in the discharge of his office to God’s people in the Old Testament, and so is Christ faithful under the New Covenant. The writer by inspiration is pointing to Moses as a leader and a hero of the Jews, who had so high an opinion of the faithfulness of Moses, and yet his faithfulness was simply pointing forward to Christ’s faithfulness. No one should doubt Jesus’ faithfulness to the one who had commissioned him apostle and high priest. Jesus speaks of his work, that of earning eternal life for mankind in John 17:3-5: “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*”

Now look at the position of Christ. No one would give more honor to any house, no matter how grand and beautiful it is, than that given to the builder. To rank both builder and building on the same level is foolish. Now look at Moses and Jesus. Moses was only part of the house of Israel. Jesus as God was the builder of the house, just as he is the builder, the creator of everything. As a created being, Moses occupied a high position in

Israel and was worthy of honor. As the creator of all things including Moses and Israel, Jesus was worthy of the highest honor and glory.

Look at the superior glory and excellence of Christ above Moses. Christ was the maker, the builder of the house. Moses was but a member in it. By the house we understand the church of God, the people of God gathered together under Christ, their maker and head. Christ is the maker of this house of the church in all ages. Moses was a minister in the house. He was instrumental under Christ in governing and leading the house, but Christ is the maker of all things; for he is God and no one less than God could build the church. No one else could either lay the foundation or build up the superstructure. Paul admitted to the Corinthians: ***"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)

No less power was required to make the church than to make the world; the world was made out of nothing, the church was made out of materials completely unfit for such a building – it is made out of sinners! Christ, who is God, drew the blueprints of the church, provided the materials, and by almighty power has put together and united this his house, and crowned it all with his own presence, which is the true glory of this house of God. Christ was the master of this house, as well as the maker. Moses was only a faithful servant, for a testimony of those things that were afterwards to be revealed. Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is the rightful owner and sovereign ruler of the church. Moses was only a servant, for a testimony of all those things relating to the church which would be more clearly and completely revealed in the gospel in New Testament times by the Spirit of Christ. For these reasons Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses, and of greater regard and consideration. Moses was a servant in the house of Israel. Jesus was the very son. As Jesus said in John 5:46: ***"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me."***

This is the first time this title, "Christ", meaning "messiah" is used in this letter.

With the words ***"we are his house"*** we have a picture of the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints. It is what we call the invisible church, the one described in Ephesians 2:19-21: ***"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."*** All believers of the old and new Testaments are part of this glorious house, built on the son and ruled by the son.

Each of us personally and individually are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in us by faith. All of us jointly, as we are united by the bonds of grace, truth, and the gospel are this house.

We are encouraged to ***"hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."*** If we maintain a bold confession of the truths of the gospel, upon which our hopes of grace and glory are built, and live upon those hopes and live up to those hopes, so as to have a holy rejoicing in them, we shall abide firm to the end. We pray God that there be steadfastness and perseverance in these hopes unto the end. In fixing our hearts and minds on Jesus, we take the truths of the gospel into our heads and hearts. By the grace of God we may build our hope of happiness upon those truths. With God guiding us, we pray that we make public confession of those truths. All this is follow up to the words before our text: ***"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."*** (Hebrews 2:14-18)

Jesus is the High Priest. ***"Christ is faithful as a son over God's house."*** Oh, dear Child of God, He is your apostle and high priest. Believe that and be saved! Amen.

(Correction: the last paragraph was cut off and omitted from the printed Ministry By Mail. RM)