

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fourth Sunday after Easter, April 29, 2018

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

Hymns: 279, 285:1-3, 278, 210, 207:5.

Lessons: 2 Chronicles 32:16-23, Hebrews 1:1-14, Luke 1:5-25.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 2:1-4.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Anyone who has ever done any boating can easily imagine drifting away on a lake or especially on a creek or river without any paddle or oars or any way to move the boat. There is not much that is scarier when you are boating and drifting away. Please pay attention as today we hear a

WARNING AGAINST NEGLECTING SALVATION

- 1. Be careful lest you drift away from Christ.**
- 2. It is so easy to do,**
- 3. But we find abundant encouragement in God's Word!**

God has not withdrawn his promise of salvation. It still stands. *“This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.”* God himself announced this salvation to Adam and Eve after the first sin. This message was confirmed in the Scriptures by all who proclaimed and heard that message. Throughout the Old Testament Scriptures God testified to this powerful message with miracles. Jesus himself performed miracles. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the early days of the New Testament church was the ability to perform miracles. Just begin reading the book of Acts to prove that.

In addition to the signs, wonders, and miracles, God has spoken to us through his very own, only-begotten Son, who is greater than angels! *“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.”* Hebrews 2:1 (ESV)

How is it that people stray from Jesus, leave him? Is it most often a huge, thunderous revelation that instantly drags them away from faith? No. Most often it is just little steps, little things, or as scripture says here, drifting away. And how does that happen?

Well, think of how easy it is to drift away from God's Word. If we were accustomed to going to church as children or before we were confirmed, our Christian parents brought us to church regularly. Then, once we feel that we have a little more freedom, we don't go to church regularly. We find other activities to occupy our Sunday mornings and the evenings when we have worship services. And if we aren't hearing the Word of God regularly, are we reading it regularly on our own? Often not. That is drifting away. In general, aren't all humans by nature included to be lazy, and drift through life? Just drifting along in life is much easier than working to move in a particular direction.

We must be reminded from scripture again and again what we read later in the letter to the Hebrews. *“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.”* Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV) When we give up meeting together, we are drifting away.

We are here admonished that *“We must pay more careful attention.”* And what is it that we must pay more careful attention to? *“To what we have heard.”* Just today you have heard and are hearing the Gospel –

the good news about what Jesus did for you. Most of you have heard the Word of God in its truth and purity all your lives. But sometimes having something all our lives leads to a lack of appreciation for it. The earthly proverb goes ‘Sometimes you don’t know what you had until it is gone.’ It is so easy to think that we will have things just as they have always been – the ability to go to church whenever we wish, the ability to take Lord’s Supper whenever we wish, the ability to always have someone to teach our children Bible history in Sunday School and to teach the catechism. Of course, Martin Luther reminds us that the head of the household is to teach Christian doctrine in the simplest way to those in his household!

But will things always stay the same? We need look no further than the obituaries in the newspaper or on the radio to realize that things just don’t go on the same without changing. Death is the very most drastic change that can occur. And no one ever knows when death will come. Then, too, there are other life-changing accidents or illnesses that can change our lives in an instant. Even what we are doing this very moment will never occur again. All these very people gathered in this room hearing these words and singing these very hymns will never occur in exactly the same way again.

But if we don’t hear the Word of God, if we don’t read the Word of God, we are drifting away from God. Satan and the world have ways of filling our time, of filling our minds and hearts so that we think we have no time for God. We think that we have no time for what God teaches us in his Word. We think that we have heard it all before. We think that we know it all. If that is true, why would God tell us to **“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”**? 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV) If someone is growing, he or she is changing.

And the change that we are warned against here is drifting away from the salvation God has provided to us. Do you realize how serious this is?

In the first chapter of this book of the Bible Jesus had just been compared to the angels, and shown to be greater than the angels, God’s messengers who do his bidding. Now we read **“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”** Messengers are to give the message they are supposed to deliver, not their own message and opinions. Angels are God’s messengers, and in addition to watching over us, they delivered messages from God. When they appeared, they did this in a most dramatic way. Think of the angels at Jesus’ empty tomb. Their message was astounding, earth-shattering, unbelievable at first to those who heard it.

God most often spoke through his prophets and evangelists and put into their mouths and pens the very words they were to speak and write. Peter wrote: **“And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”** 2 Peter 1:19 (NIV) But when God did speak through angels, the message was much more startling. The birth of Jesus was announced in the heavens by angels. The resurrection of Jesus was announced at the empty tomb by angels. The coming birth of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, was announced in the temple to Zechariah by an angel as you heard in our Gospel lesson. Many times throughout the Old Testament angels delivered amazing messages to God’s people.

Then we read **“For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?”** The choice is salvation or damnation. And God offers salvation free, and he even leads us to believe it.

This salvation was first announced by God in the Garden of Eden, when our first parents sinned. It was repeated hundreds of times throughout the Old Testament. We hear some of the prophecies in preparation for Christmas, the birth of Christ. We hear some of those prophecies in preparation for the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and preparation for the celebration of his resurrection.

And now, what about you? Will you come back here on the next opportunity to hear that message? What about the empty chair next to you? Will you take opportunity to admonish the one who should be next to you here?

Isn’t it easy for you find a reason for skipping worship? Can’t you find a dozen reasons, or twenty reasons? Can’t you find a hundred reasons for not joining in worship with those who believe, teach, and confess the same as you? (pause) What would happen if you went without food for a week? Or two weeks?

And what happens when you skip worship? What happens when you don't read the Word of God every day? For a newly converted Christian, it may lead to feeling terrible, to miss those things. But to those of us who have had the Word of God in its truth and purity for so long, it may be just another day. A day to do one of those activities for which you skipped the Word of God.

The third commandment teaches us that we are not to despise preaching and the Word of God but gladly hear and learn it. That is God's command, to "remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy". It isn't just a suggestion. It isn't really an option, for God will not hold us guiltless when we despise preaching and his Word.

Oh, but we think: I'm not despising it. I'm just taking a day off. When does neglect become despising? When does just skipping church and not taking time for his Word become despising his Word? Satan is working hard on all our hearts to make us want to ignore what God says. When does taking a day off become taking a month off? Do you see the danger of skipping? It is so easy to do after you have done it once, or twice, or three times.

Yes, this is a law sermon. But there is good reason for it. We all need the law of God to show us our sinfulness and need of a Savior. When we recognize our wretchedness, our sinfulness, then the message of salvation is so much more precious. Today God asks all of us ***"How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?"*** How shall we escape the corruption that is in the world? And more importantly, how shall we escape eternal "corruption", that is, damnation? Peter gives us the answer in Scripture: ***"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*** 2 Peter 1:3-11 (NIV)

The message of salvation is something we all need. Don't our sins trouble us? Don't we look for hope and comfort in this terrible world with all its wickedness and uncertainty? That salvation is what Scripture today is pointing us toward at this very moment.

Hebrews reminds us again and again of the salvation Jesus won for us. ***"See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."*** Hebrews 3:12-13 (NIV) And: ***"Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest."*** Hebrews 4:1-3 (NIV)

Then this is our confidence: ***"Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 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."*** Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

May we never drift away from our salvation! And may this be a place where that message of salvation through Jesus Christ is always proclaimed in its truth and purity. Amen.