

Hold Fast

Psalm 16

Hebrews 10: 11-25

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Psalm 16

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."

As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.

Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Hebrews 10: 11-25

And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," he also adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach 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. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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God loves us all equally, there are no favorites. God loves each of us with the same love, or as Augustine wisely said, "God loves each of us as if there were only one of us." There is nothing we can do to be separated from the love of God, there is nothing that can touch us, nor anything that we can touch, that would take God's love and care away from us. There is nothing we can do, or did, to earn God's gracious love, so there is no way to lose it. There is nothing we

could ever do to make God love us any more or any less. God's love is perfect, and we are never separated from it.

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I hold fast to these words, to this idea, to this spiritual value, that there is absolutely nothing we could ever do to make God love us any more or any less. I hold fast to these words; hold them as tightly as a toddler with a favorite blanket, hold them as tightly as a life preserver in the midst of crashing waves, hold them as tightly as the steering wheel on an icy, treacherous road.

I hold fast to the belief, the knowledge, the value, that there is nothing we could ever do to make God love us any more or any less. I hold fast to these words because in a world that constantly creates new ways for humanity to rage with inhumanity, in a world where there is plenty, yet scarcity abounds, in a world where greed and hate are honored and elevated, I have to have the assurance that such injustice and inhumanity are not the last words. I don't know God's plan, I don't know the bigger picture, but I have ever so slowly learned to be content and confident as I hold fast without wavering to the knowledge that God loves even when I can't, even when we can't. There is hope and restoration in that. If I did not hold fast to this truth, I would drown in a sea of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. Even when there are horrific experiences of hatred, unspeakable acts of evil, heart-wrenching situations in which I cannot comprehend how someone could still be loved as a child of God, the words of psalmist still echo through what I must hold fast to as boundary lines where I take refuge, find protection, and counsel in the strength and knowledge that God's equal love is for all; that we can falter and fail beyond measure yet God's love endures forever. Trusting in God alone shows me, shows us, the path of life. We can rest secure even when we cannot understand.

Hold fast. Hold onto something tightly because it is so important, it is essential to your very being, to the very depths of your soul. Hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering, for God is faithful, present, and assuring. Hold fast to the love that will not let you go. Hold fast to the love poured out for each one of us.

The writer of the letter, of the sermon, Hebrews, knows the profound, essential need to hold fast to a truth, to find strength, assurance, and encouragement even in the darkest, bleakest of times. He encourages the people to hold fast, to hold on to God with unwavering faith. He knows that they are tired, distracted and confused. They are living in a perilous time. Many have endured martyrdom, endured suffering for their faith, some have been imprisoned, others lost family or property. They have been subjected to scorn and public ridicule. The words they hear call them to persevere, to be patient, to hold fast. If they are at the end of their rope, then they should tie a knot and hang on. Don't walk away, don't stop believing, don't stop gathering for worship and fellowship, but rather hold fast to the confession of the shared hope without wavering, for God is indeed faithful. Hold fast to provoking one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another. Hold fast to the teachings of Jesus. Hold fast to the saving grace and redemption of Jesus Christ.

In our time, we do not face the same perils that our earliest faith ancestors endured, but that does not mean we have any less challenges and hurdles as we too are tired, distracted and confused. We have no less reason to hold fast to God's promises, assurance, and faithfulness.

In this extended season of Covid in which the world has experienced a great deal of suffering and death as the pandemic drags on and has become a political weapon as much as a disease, as it has exposed radical health access inequalities, deeply seated racism, growing

economic disparity, and created stress and anxiety levels so intense that teachers cannot teach, students cannot learn, workers are burnt out, employers have ridiculously low staffing, and our collective mental health is suffering, we can indeed relate to this community for the writer of Hebrews. Our faith may be weary, weak, and shaken, but we are encouraged to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. Hold on to the affirmation of faith. Jesus is our sympathetic intercessor, our compassionate high priest, and the assurance of faith encouraging us to hold tightly, to hold fast, to our confession of hope.

Even in the midst of all that we live, see, know and experience now; when hate, violence, rejection and denial seem to be the prized values that guide many, let us hold fast to the real value, the truth, that God loves us all beyond measure, even when that truth feels impossible to comprehend. In the midst of the darkness around us, the short tempers, the long waits, the news that we can barely bear to watch, let us consider how to provoke one another with a true heart in full assurance of faith, to love and good deeds.

In the ancient days of persecution and martyrdom, in these current days of fear, anger and disease, there is nothing we could ever do to make God love us any more or any less. God's love is perfect, and we are never separated from it.

Hold fast, hold fast to the One who always loves us all, hold fast to the One who redeemed us all. Hold fast to these promises; hold them as tightly as a toddler with a favorite blanket, hold them as tightly as a life preserver in the midst of crashing waves, hold them as tightly as the steering wheel on an icy, treacherous road. Amen.