

Today we're continuing our series in Hebrews.

You'll remember that we don't really know who wrote this book, when it was written, or much about who it went to. There's many theories and no one's entirely sure.

Maybe they were being persecuted by the Romans or by other followers of the Jesus way, those in Judaism.

Whatever the case, we know this sermon was written for a group of weary followers of Christ. They wanted to give up on Christ. They wanted to go back to the way it used to be. They were weary.

We are not persecuted. But we know that feeling from time to time, don't we? Weary. Weary followers of Christ.

Weary of doing good. Weary of the way of Christ which can feel more like restrictions than the good life. Weary of waiting; of promises that are unfulfilled. Weary of dealing with the same human brokenness for thousands of years. Weary of Christians who give us a bad rap. Weary of living our faith in a world that tells us our faith is ridiculous. Weary of doing the work, of laboring in God's kingdom. Weary of growing, becoming, bearing fruit, being transformed or healing. Weary of forgiving. Weary of repenting of the same thing over and over and over again.

Weary. I'm more often than not a weary follower of Jesus. Sometimes I'm even ready to throw in the towel on following Jesus.

We like to imagine and sometimes are sold that the way of Christ filled with hallelujahs and victories and hurrahs.

But more often than not, we're weary followers of Christ, barely holding on to faith, buffeted by the things around us, still sluggin' through a pile of our own brokenness.

And if we're offering thanks and praise, they might be like Lennard Cohen says: cold and broken hallelujahs.

This book of Hebrews is written to weary followers of the resurrected Christ. Who don't know what to do, or where to go, or how to follow or where God is.

The author in the previous chapters, chapters three and four, is basically saying:

'Yes, you are in the wilderness like the Israelites were when Moses was their leader. I see that you, like them, want to give up. Figuratively speaking, you want to go back to Egypt. You want something better than manna and quail. You want water. You're exhausted, unsure, frustrated you're still travelling this barren land. Waiting for the promised land to be seen on the horizon.

I see that. But keep on keeping on. Continue walking. Go in the way of Christ. for this is the way: wilderness is part of the journey, something to keep living in, not escaping from.

Don't give up, don't fall away. For there is goodness here in the wilderness, there is sabbath, there is rest. There is provision. One day your struggle will end and there will come a day, says Rev 21, when there will be no more crying or weeping. Rest will come. And in the mean time, continue on; don't disobey, don't fall prey. Please resist the temptation. Keep on doing good. Keep on following Christ

Because even in the wilderness God sees everything.

This is kind of a strange transition, I'm not going to lie.

Yet the author says this next:

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

Now to be honest. If this is where the passage ended, I'd give up. I'd walk away. Too often this is where we stop. We say things like: God will judge you! You'll be held to account! Don't do wrong. Don't stop following God! There will be consequences!

There are indeed moments when that is good news: like for survivors of trauma, for those who got swindled unfairly and who need the people who did that to be held accountable. We're seeing that this would be good news to those protesting about black lives mattering. It is important to taking responsibility for the ways we haven't loved God or neighbor or ourselves so healing can happen

But many times in Christian history all this has been used as a fear tactic inappropriately and disproportionately. We know holding judgements, punishment and fear and hell over people rarely gets the transformation and life we hope for. Especially when we're weary and we're barely getting by.

Yet here it is. Word of God is alive and active, dividing, exposing, nothing is hidden.

We are seen by God. fully. In a fairly vulnerable way.

Even in the wilderness, God sees the ways we're struggling, the ways we do something with good intentions but get mixed up, or the way we do good things with bad intentions—all this is seen.

Often in the gospel Jesus exposes people—for being white washed tombs—nice on the outside but not changed on the inside; for their kindness that isn't kindness; for their religiosity but no transformation. Jesus exposes the injustice and the evil that is happening right in front of people's eyes and under their watch. And it's uncomfortable. To be sure. But it's for their good, so they can find healing, forgiveness, a way forward in their relationships and with God and in their world..

I remember one of my first times coming to an evening service at Woody Nook where Pastor Neil was preaching. Before the scripture reading he said: "Be prepared for God's word to challenge and change you, disturb you and comfort you".

This is true. If we are listening to God's word, looking at Jesus' life, paying attention to the Spirit this will happen! And we need this sometimes.

Just like if we have an operation we need to see what's going on to name it, remove it and heal from what it is that's ailing us. We sometimes need God to reveal what's happening inside us.

But the vulnerability can be scary. No one loves to speak of their mistakes—we'd rather keep our weak side hidden. We'd rather not be known by my last mistake, the last frustrating thing we said, the way we seem to struggle with the same things over and over and over again. It's hard to own the way we *used* to be. Or the way our particular weakness and weariness show up in every place we find ourselves. Because these things, our vulnerability can easily be used against us. And not every revealing is done in kindness. We know this personally—it's happened to all of us—in our homes, by our friends, those who oppose us, in our own church. It can be scary to be that kind of vulnerable. Even in front of God.

Yet here it is. And it's meant to do two sorts of things:

First, Meant to remind us we are actors in God's story and makes "every ordinary life, every ordinary moment a moment to respond with faithfulness"

When we're weary, we'd rather peace out our ordinary, sometimes weary lives, it reminds us it's not just what we believe that matters, but how we live. We are called to faithfulness.

And second: This isn't meant to be scary, but assurance of God's presence. You'll remember from Psalm 139 that God can find us in every place, sees us on the far

side of the sea, in the depths, in the darkness. This is meant to remind us, even in the place we find ourselves, God is with us.

But in all of this, the most important thing is that before we can even take a breath, the author jumps to the very next sentence.

Therefore!

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, ^p Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”

We are launched straight into God’s kindness.

Now first, a high priest, was a person who served in the temple in Jerusalem.

“They would approach God on behalf of the people, to gather what the people bring—their offerings, their prayers, the symbols of their repentance, their cares, their deepest needs—and to take these offerings into the very presence of God....[into the holy of holies in the temple which symbolized the very presence of God] But if the priest faces toward God on behalf of humanity.” ¹

If you remember, on the north side of the north fellowship hall at Woody Nook is a picture by Karen Tamminga-Paton with two hands holding a bowl filled with the prayers and petitions of the people rising to God—in some ways this is a picture of a high priest.

But “the priest also faces toward humanity on behalf of God. The priest represents God’s holy presence among the people.” ²

God came among us in Christ to show us God is in our midst, with us in all things, even the wilderness.

This priest, Jesus, is unlike the others because he is both: God! And human!

Jesus gone into the heavens. Bringing all our humanity straight into the being of God.

And divine—he brought God among us to show us a different way of living is possible.

But. This high priest Jesus. The one to whom we give an account, who we are laid bare before.

This high priest. Can empathize with our weaknesses. He’s been tempted in every way.

¹ Long, T. G. (1997). [Hebrews](#) (p. 65). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

² Long, T. G. (1997). [Hebrews](#) (p. 65). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.

This reminds us!

Jesus has lived, breathed, slept, ate and walked in the wilderness. Literally. And perhaps his entire ministry.

You'll remember:

- Jesus was tempted with power, authority, and recognition.
- He knows of being beaten, betrayed by friends, sold.
- Jesus knows death and grief which wracks him.
- He knows what it's like to not have enough of himself to go around. or of expectations that are too large to meet.
- He knows of being tempted to give up and throw in the towel on the whole mission.
- He knows of living with people who ask too many questions (disciples), who don't come through on their word.
- Of being told to leave because he was from the wrong town.
- Of opposition that is at your throat.
- He knows family dysfunction, a family who is ashamed of him.
- Of what it is to face your own death and the pain of it.
- Systems that do not relent.
- Of God seemingly being absent.
- Wearing out from helping others.
- Of words being manipulated to mean what you did not say.
- The desire for rest and peace, but not getting it.
- Angry over injustice—swindling....

What a relief that it is this high priest who is our mediator who we will be laid before. There's something beautiful here.

First. someone who has gone the path ahead of us...

There's something about chatting with someone who gets it, isn't there. Someone who's struggled with the same thing as you, experienced the same thing. Who gets it from the inside out. Who can help you figure out what you'll need to face the obstacles you'll find, who can remember and cheer you on, who can give you a hug because they know.

Like, for instance, when I wanted to hike the West Coast Trail, I chatted with a number of people who had done it so I knew what to bring, what kinds of things would help me face the many ladders and mud pits and mental exhaustion of hiking so many days in a row.

Or like Pastor Chad mentioned to me this week: it's so much less scary to tell your parent what you've done wrong if they've struggled with the same things and can help you get through it.

It's this humanness that ascended into heaven and is in the very being of God. This very lived experience in the throne room of God. God came among us in Jesus and it is not to a far-off, distant God who will lay us bare, but the one who gets our very struggle, knows our very weakness, understands our every temptations.

And so we can come boldly, confidently, with great courage. Not hiding in the bush like Adam and Eve afraid of what God will do, but we can come vulnerably, boldly, allowing ourselves to be seen, being honest about our need.

We are weary, so we come.
We are tempted, so we come.
We are not sure anymore, so we come.

With boldness to find the help and grace and mercy we need.

Second. Jesus faced all these things without sin.

This is not about Jesus being a goodie too shoes. This is about Jesus showing us that there is a different way forward. There's another way of living possible. One that allows us to be healed—and to participate in that hard work.

So we come boldly to the throne of grace. To find what we need to live the Jesus way. To find the grace and mercy and what we need to overcome the obstacles we're facing.

Whether you're doing pretty good. Or if you're in the wilderness wanting to give up. Remember, the Jesus way is not a victory march—it's filled with wilderness, with weariness, with temptation, with falling and weeping and crying out to God. But we come to God to find the strength we need.

I want to leave you with a song that I have found helpful in my journey. When I was doing my degree to become a pastor we sang it as a community every second day. It's from the last few verses of Jude and called "To Him Who is Able" by Brian Moss.

The words are: To him who is able to keep you from falling, to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. To the only God our savior be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages both now and forever more, Amen.

And so I invite you to sit and listen to it, the words are not on the screen. And allow yourself to remember it is Jesus who will indeed present you before God without fault

and with great joy. Or to ask for what you need right now. Or to come boldly, allowing yourself to be vulnerable before God so you can find the healing needed.

Grace and peace.

The song link:

https://youtu.be/AKg_YCy7MHY