

SERMON

Hebrews 10:11-14,19-25

A Lively Church

Nunawading and Waverley, 14-11-21

Dear friends in Christ,

We are not a large congregation and some may say that we don't have much prestige. We cannot boast new facilities or are visible on a busy suburban corner. In comparison to Crossway, Syndal or New Hope Baptist churches, we are pretty minuscule. The writer of Hebrews looks at other things. What is at the heart of the congregation? Is there **confidence** about your place in God's kingdom? Are we full of hope, not letting anything get us down or make us feel like giving up? Are we confessors of our salvation? Do people **spur one another on to love, to do good deeds, to worship together, and encourage one another?** Hebrews is talking about a congregation steeped in faith, hope and love, which are the most important things in the end.

Quality number one, **confidence to enter and draw near to the Father through the blood of Jesus**. The temple in Jerusalem was divided into two parts: the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. The Holiest of Holies was separated by **a curtain**. In the writer's mind, this represented the barrier that exists between human beings and God. We do not know the Lord properly and are separated from him by a broken relationship, one of rebellion, selfishness, arrogance and an unwillingness to live in harmony with his good ways as described in his law, the ten commandments. When the Son of God came into the world, he burst through this barrier, symbolised by the curtain. By dying on the cross and rising in victory, Jesus became **the living way through the curtain** to God the Father, into his **Most Holy place** and most holy presence. Because of him, we can be **confident** of being saved by him.

How sure are you of being saved? "God is Good for You", written by Greg Sheridan, contains the stories of many famous Australian politicians. Almost all say they are poor Christians and hope that there may be an after-life of some sort for them. I think these folk are no clear about the gospel. Based on our efforts, we have no confidence at all of coming into **the unapproachable light of God**.

Based on Christ, we can be completely and utterly sure that we will be saved. Please listen to this part of the sermon. **Our hearts have been sprinkled clean and our bodies washed** by our Lord Jesus. We have the key to the door, we have the right as children of God, we are the Lord's adopted children in baptism, born of God himself. The evils of the past are gone and the Spirit has cleansed our **guilty consciences**. May everyone here say after me: "Jesus has saved me; of this, I am sure."

Once we are secure in this trust and faith, we can hold a steady course in **hope, not swerving** to the right or to the left, which is quality number two. We all get tired and then we feel jaded with the Christian life. The tedium of the church, that so little changes can get us down. However, we would have less stagnation if new people were attending, baptisms were taking place, evangelism and acts of outreach were occurring. The starting point is to be a **professing** Christians. Having an impact on others can energise us. Hope is one of our best qualities because a lot of people, especially young people, have lost confidence in life. What's the use when we are going to destroy the planet anyway? If we are just a cosmic accident, as science says we are, what is the point of life? How wonderful it is that we have hope in Christ. He tells us why we are here, what value he has put on our lives and gives us a mission, to love, to change the world, to tell others about him and be filled with his love and his presence. Hope is our great asset.

But love, too! Our society is splintering into competing groups, often hating each other, saying vile things through social media, politicising everything and simply not loving one another. Our great attractiveness as a church is our gentleness, our love and willingness to talk things through if we disagree, striving to reach understanding, acceptance and forgiveness of each other. Yes indeed, **let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together ... but encouraging one another**. In this pandemic and through lock-downs, we have held together, we have talked to each other, met together, and still celebrated the holy Eucharist in each other's presence. We have come through together, maybe, even stronger. All of the activities we can engage in the world cannot come anywhere near the special bonds of fellowship we have as brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us be this loving community of people as we hold out hope to others and

draw nearer and nearer to the presence of the Father. We may not be big in numbers but we are great in spirit.