

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany; February 4, 2023

Hebrews 3:1-6

“The Son is Faithful over God’s House”

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your attention on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. He was faithful to the one who appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in God’s whole house. In fact, Jesus is worthy of greater glory than Moses, in the same way that the builder of a house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, and God is the one who built everything.

Moses was faithful as a servant within God’s whole house by testifying to the things that would be spoken. But Christ is faithful as a Son over God’s house. We are his house, if we hold on firmly to our confidence and the hope about which we boast until the end.

Do you remember Catechism class? Some of you haven’t gotten there yet. A few you don’t have to remember it, because you’re in it! But if you grew up in this Lutheran branch of Christianity, or in many of the other Christian denominations, you hopefully remember what you learned, and still review it from time to time.

There is a passage from the letter to the Hebrews that is used in many Catechisms – not just Luther’s, but some of the others, too. It is verse 4 of chapter 3, which you heard earlier: **For every house is built by someone, and God is the one who built everything.** In what section of the Catechism do you think that verse is cited? It is the section on Creation. I remember my boyhood pastor illustrating the point the Catechism is making: no house builds itself. Houses do not accidentally construct themselves without architects, carpenters, masons, electricians, and plumbers. Our world and the entire universe is an amazingly elaborate system that could not have accidentally assembled itself. It had to have a Designer and Builder. Also, the raw materials had to come from somewhere in the first place. Pipes and bricks and planks don’t just pop into existence. They have to come from somewhere.

This all bothers me a little. I think it’s acceptable to use this passage to teach the truth of Creation, because the end of it says, **God is the one who built everything.** “Everything,” of course would include Creation. But the whole universe is not really the “house” that the writer had in mind when he wrote this verse. **We are his house, if we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope about which we boast until the end.** The house is the Holy Christian Church, everyone who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for their sins and rose on Easter Sunday. The Word of God is the foundation of this house; we are built on words the Holy Spirit recorded through the prophets and apostles. The Word is the source of our confidence and hope, and the Word keeps our faith strong until the end. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of the house; the cornerstone has to be perfect, because all the other stones are built off of it. When the Spirit brings a sinner to faith, he builds that stone into the house of the Church. That stone, together with all the rest, is perfected in Christ. And all those stones are brought together into a single structure, to stand unified through all time. It’s a beautiful picture: we are God’s house, perfected by Christ, built into one structure, resting on the truth of the Word. **God is the one who built everything. We are his house, if we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope about which we boast until the end.**

But what do you think of first when you hear “God’s house”? Do you think of the whole universe? Do you think of the Holy Christian Church? Probably not. If you’re a typical layperson, you probably think first of this building where we come together and worship, and all the houses where Christians gather to worship.

Is that wrong? No, this is God's house, too. And it's not the "house" the writer of the Hebrews had in mind, but it is related. He says we are God's house, his Church, if we hold **our confidence and the hope until the end**. The Holy Christian Church gathers in these houses to hear about Jesus Christ. We come to this house to hear that Jesus loves us so much that he came down from heaven to be that perfect cornerstone for us. The cornerstone of any ancient building had to be perfect, so the rest of the building would be, too. Our confidence and hope is that Jesus has done that for us; he lived a life where everything lined up perfectly with God's will, and died to take our sins away and make us worthy to be built into God's house of the Holy Christian Church. We come here to hear about the confidence and hope we have in Christ so that we keep believing it to the end. We come to hear from our foundation of the Word of God.

So what Christians do in these houses, churches, keeps them in the faith, and keeps them in the house of all believers, the Holy Christian Church.

And because we are in Christ, he watches over what happens in these houses. Think of today's Gospel. Jesus was in a synagogue, where people went to hear the prophets, and in this case the Son of God himself, in order grow in their faith. A demon entered that house of God, possessing a man. When Jesus saw that he moved. He saw an unclean spirit and said, "Not in my house." The evil spirit interrupted Jesus' teaching and confronted him. Jesus said, **"Be quiet! Come out of him!"** Jesus watched over that house of God, and when an unclean spirit entered, he drove it out and kept God's house clean.

Jesus watches over this house too, and keeps it clean. Now, I am not suggesting that there are demons in this room, or that any of you are demon-possessed. But we come here unclean. We come here as sinners, and our worship is never perfect. No sermon preached here has ever been perfectly prepared or delivered. No one has listened with perfect attention, or sung or prayed with a totally clean heart. We are sinners, and our worship is tainted by it.

But Jesus watches over this house. He is our perfect cornerstone, and we are built on him. So he cleanses our worship of all uncleanness, and it rises to the Father's throne as incense, a pleasing sacrifice. And Jesus works in this house by sending his Holy Spirit to work through the foundation of the Word that he inspired, so **we hold on firmly to our confidence and the hope about which we boast until the end**.

It is good to remember that the letter to the Hebrews was written with a purpose. Every word of the Bible, the foundation of the Church, is written to grow our confidence and hope so that it lasts to the end. But each book and letter had an original audience, and these were Hebrews. They were Jewish people who had converted to Christianity, built into the house of God. But they were apparently considering leaving that house by leaving Jesus behind. They were about to go back to Moses and the Old Testament, and to worship in the temple instead of their Christian congregations. The writer wants to stop them from doing that; he wants them to stay in worship with their fellow Christians and remain in the house of the Christian Church. And he understands the best way to do this is not by attacking Moses and the worship of the Old Testament. He writes: **Moses was faithful in God's whole house**. Moses was great; he led the house of God, the church of the Old Testament. And he did it faithfully. But he did it by speaking about a fulfillment to come. And the worship of the Old Testament looked forward to a fulfillment to come. **Moses faithful as a servant within God's whole house by testifying to the things that would be spoken**.

Moses was a great servant, but Jesus is the fulfillment of Moses' words, and all the worship of the Old Testament church. **Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your attention on**

Jesus, the apostle and high priest we confess. The high priest led the worship of the Old Testament Church; Jesus is the ultimate High Priest he looked ahead to. The high priest prayed for the people and sacrificed for their sins. Jesus prayed perfectly for us as part of his holy life, and made the eternal sacrifice of himself for our sins. And Moses was a servant in God's house, the Church of the Old Testament...**But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house.** Sons normally work the hardest and best in the house, harder and better than servants – at least the wise sons who understand that the house is also theirs. Jesus is the holy and eternal Son of God, and works best of all in the house of God.

He works in the house of the universe, holding all things together by his almighty power, and guiding all things for the good of his Church. He works best in this house, proclaiming his saving love to us in Word and Supper, maintaining our hope and confidence until the end, purifying our worship with his righteousness. And he works best in the house of the Holy Christian Church, perfecting every stone with his holy life and death, building every believer into that house that stands through eternity.

Nothing is better than Jesus, who is faithful as a Son over God's house. The Hebrews needed to hear that, and so do we. Because while it's unlikely that any of us feel a pull away from this house to worship at a synagogue, or to leave the house of the Church for a Christ-less faith, we do feel pulls of other kinds, away from this place, away from the Holy Christian Church. It is most often the pull that worked against Adam and Eve. The basic lie they fell prey to is that life will be better without the Lord. You can be wiser, better, happier, more fulfilled outside of God's house. Adam and Eve listened to that lie, and to some extent we all do. It shows whenever we leave God and his will to find something more, something better apart from him.

But Jesus is best, and gives the best life. The writer has called him our high priest, the faithful Son over God's house. He also says: **He was faithful to the one who appointed him.** The Father appointed Jesus to come and save us, and Jesus completed that mission. He showed perfect faithfulness not only to his Father, but also to us, his house. His righteous life and sacrificial death make us worthy to be part of God's Church, his house. The writer calls the Hebrews and all Christians **holy**, because we are in Christ. And he has worked faithfully to keep us there, renewing our confidence and hope.

You will never find anything better than Jesus. Anything or anyone who tells you differently is telling you the most dangerous lie of all, because it contradicts God's most beautiful truth: **Christ is faithful as a Son over God's own house.** He is best because as your high priest, as God's Son, as the faithful one, he gives you what's best: a place in God's house forever.

Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, focus your attention on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. And that brings us back to this house of God. This is where we see him, hear him, touch him and receive him to focus our hearts on him. This is where purifies us and renews our hope and confidence in him until the end.

This is true: **Jesus is worthy of greater glory** – and just greater glory than Moses, but greater glory than everything and everyone else in this world. He is faithful as a Son – God's Son and our Savior – over God's house. To him be glory forever. Amen.