

Call to Worship

God alone is our hope and salvation.

God alone is our peace and security.

It is not by finding and following the right rules and rituals are we made right with God.

It is not by entering the right doors and saying the right creeds are we able to approach God.

But it is by God's mercy made known in Jesus Christ that our brokenness with God is healed.

We have come to offer praise and thanksgiving; let us worship together.

Prayer of Invocation

Lord Jesus, open us to all that you would have us be for you and for others.

Breakthrough into our lives and our church with new possibilities. You are the one who reveals the truth to us, truth about God, and truth about ourselves. Help us to open our minds and hearts by the light of the Holy Spirit to your Word. Enable us to worship you with sincere and trusting hearts. Amen.

The Word

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

Every priest stands every day serving and offering the same sacrifices over and over, sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when this priest [Jesus], offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right side of God. **Since then, he's waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for his feet, because he perfected the people who are being made holy with one offering for all time.**

Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, and we have a great high priest over God's house. **Therefore, let's draw near with a genuine heart with the certainty that our faith gives us, since our hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water.**

Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable. And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. **Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.**

Living the Word

"Don't Forget Us!" The title of the video we watched in our Bible Study Class on Wednesday, which brought us through the ages, telling of people who had to hide and suffer for their faith in God through their belief in Jesus Christ. Some died, some hid their families in underground caves, living for months at a time without coming into the daylight.

We then heard Rebecca, tell her story of how at age 6, and a child living in Sudan she had experienced bombs dropping around her, loosing both parents, she ran. Even at age 6 she knew her faith in God would carry her through whatever happened. As she ran, she saw others die around her. Among the survivors, she with the remnants of her community began a long trek through a wild animal infested desert, where more were killed.

She survived and is now grown with a daughter of her own. She tells this story for us to know that many in our modern world still suffer for their faith and beliefs in Christ. Then she prayed – praising God for all of the beauty we have been given around us. When asked what she would like from us, she said “Don’t forget us!”

Her faith carried her through all of the painful past, yet she doesn’t live in the past. She looks to the future, sharing her story of faith So that we might have strength in our faith when we come to times of trial.

Our faith hasn’t called us to go through experiences like she has had. Yet her story along with all of the stories of the Bible, should remind us who and how many have kept the faith so we would still have it. In Hebrews chapter 12, is written these words for us:

“So then, with endurance, let’s also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let’s throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith’s pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God’s throne.”

That is what the ‘Sprinkled Clean Heart’ is all about. Our hearts aren’t cleaned by anything that we do. Jesus died for it all. We don’t have to earn any of it. God loves us – me and you – so much that he sent his Son to show us God’s love in the gift of his life and ultimate gift of his death – for us. We can’t make it any better by doing anything...**But** out of gratitude we want to be a better version of ourselves for the one who created us and gave his Son for us.

The book of Hebrews, is a letter written by the Apostle Paul, a Roman Jew, to the Hebrew people – the Jewish people by blood ancestry. Other letters were written to a specific community and then carried from community to community so all could read them. This one was written to a whole race of people to help them be convinced of the importance of Jesus, a word that they needed to hear again and again.

It also would have been sent around so wide areas of people would hear these words. Today, 2000 years later, it is passed to us. The core message of this letter is that Jesus offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins. We are beyond earning it...it is already done. Yet how we live because of it – in a holy way, is who God calls us to be.

John Wesley named it Sanctifying Grace. Prevenient Grace is the love God had for us before we knew or acknowledged it; Justifying Grace is the moment we acknowledge who Jesus is for us; and Sanctifying Grace is the love we live in because we are loved. Being Sanctified is what happens when you realized that your heart has already been sprinkled clean and you are thankful – sometimes spontaneously.

Living in God’s love – holy living – has some specific characteristics that Paul lays out in Hebrews for us. First, knowing that we are forgiven, gives us the freedom and knowledge to live in confidence of God’s love.

Paul describes it in verse 19 as *"Brothers and sisters, we have confidence that we can enter the holy of holies by means of Jesus' blood, through a new and living way that he opened up for us through the curtain, which is his body, and we have a great high priest over God's house."* No more sacrifices are needed from us, yet we sacrifice because we are thankfully forgiven – gratefully washed clean by Jesus' blood.

The word 'blood' is so over used with negative connotations in our society today. TV and Movies use it to emphasize the dramas and traumas of life. We spend our whole lives trying to keep ours IN us, not leaking out.

We have come to a place where even the professionals that heal us, live within a phobia that means gloves as to not touch it. A fascination with fictitious creature such as vampires has built into outrageous proportion. All to the point that we don't want to talk about that 'gorey' stuff.

Even so, it is the substance that pulses and flows through us to keep us alive. Paul's words didn't scare or repel the people of his age, but instead it told of the importance of what Christ did for us. When we share in the cup of Jesus' life for us in Holy Communion, it should be in thanksgiving for the blood and the body sacrificed for us.

The second characteristic of Holy living is Hope. Abraham was given Hope of descendants and land in the first covenant with God. Thousands of years went by and people were still hoping for a promised Messiah to save them. Jesus came as the second covenant which is for us.

Christ also talked about when he would come again in God's final Victory. That will be the final covenant – the final thing hoped for – as Paul writes: *"Since then, he's waiting until his enemies are made into a footstool for his feet, because he perfected the people who are being made holy with one offering for all time."* Hebrews 10:13

In between time, all Christians are challenged to live faithfully in the midst of our trials, practicing hope against our outward circumstances. Verse 23 says *"Let's hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, because the one who made the promises is reliable."* We can hold on with our hope, because we have confidence in God.

The third characteristic Paul gives us of holy living is that holiness is lived within community with others. Verse 25 *"Don't stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other"*

I love when God brings several plans together in 'sync' with each other. Working on this sermon, the messages from Wednesday's Bible Study was still in the forefront of my thoughts. One of the final messages from that class was that we live with the 'great cloud of witnesses' that came before us and we have the community around us to encourage our faith (here is the really important part) AS WE ARE CALLED to also share our faith with others. We do this by letting people hear our faith stories, as I have done with the encouragement I received from the lesson on Wednesday's class.

Jesus didn't come just to comfort the afflicted, but even more so to afflict the comfortable. If necessary, we are to 'stir up' each other into living as God has called us to be. The 'E' word evangelism is not about

growing this church, but growing God's kingdom. If we do that, our church will grow. The work is to be like Peter and Paul and all that they addressed with the story of Jesus, who in turn went out and told others.

We need to share about the freedom we have through Christ; the security we have in our future through God's love; and the help we experience as we go by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth characteristic of holy living is living in solidarity with each other. Living in community can be messy. The church is not a place where everyone 'plays nice and gets along.' We all want our plan to work, our time for worship, what works best for us. But instead, a coming together to be the people of God for everyone else as well as ourselves.

Maturing in acts of love and Christ-like service to all people. Paul writes in verse 24 "*And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds.*" What does 'sparking love and good deeds' look like for Hayward United Methodist Church? It surely includes justice issues – dealing with housing and hunger. We offer opportunities all year for anyone and everyone through our work at the Food Shelf, Ruby's Pantry and now, New Reflections-Pathways of Hope.

Yet there is more than that. It is offering faith formation through classes and worship. We have been doing that. Yet it is more: now we have to reach beyond how we feel comfortable learning, to new ways of faith formation and worship for all of those who may have been brought up in different homes than we were, through our own faith stories.

The fifth and last characteristic of holy living that Paul presents is a sense of urgency. The end of Verse 25 "*encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.*" I am not sure if we see the day drawing near or not, as we don't know the day that Christ will come again. But I do know, with confidence, that Christ will come again.

How long is that? Could be another 2000 years or in the next moment. We only know that we have this lifetime. But we don't even know how long that is. We must persevere because we don't know if and when our window of opportunity to live in a holy way – will be gone.

According to the Apostle Paul - 5 Characteristics of Holy Living:
Confidence, Hope, Community Solidarity and Urgency

That is what the 'Sprinkled Clean Heart' is all about. Our hearts aren't cleaned by anything that we do. Jesus died for it all. We don't have to earn any of it. God loves us – me and you – so much that he sent his son to show us God's love in the gift of his life and ultimate gift of his death – for us. We can't make it any better by doing anything...**But** out of gratitude we want to be a better version of ourselves for the one who created us and gave his Son for us.