

Sermon: Since we have a great high priest
10 October 2021 virtual and at Trinity

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Readings: Psalm 22:1-11 and Hebrews 4:12-16

We are looking this morning at two passages. The first is from Psalm 22. The second is just four verses from the book of Hebrews.

What is the one point I want you to take to heart today. It is this:

You are not alone!

No matter how steep and rocky the road is you have a guide and a shepherd who has walked your road before you.

Sue and I walked the Camino to Santiago, St James, in Northern Spain. Just under 1000km.

It was an amazing privilege but it was also a real physical challenge. We had guidance in three forms.

The first from those who knew little of the journey was of no help although well-intended. "You will make it - Spain is flat" meant little as we struggled across the Pyrenees from France to Spain.

The second was a well-researched guidebook written by an author who had travelled the road and provided maps, points of interest and helpful suggestions.

The third and most helpful was guidance we got from those we met who had walked the road before us. In particular, those pilgrims who had reached Santiago, and were walking home. They had recently been along the road we were walking and were happy to provide real guidance on what lay ahead, which path to take, and encouragement to persevere, where to find a place to sleep that night, what the next stretch would entail, and how to manage pain from blisters and strained muscles.

They were willing to help provided they were approached and asked for help. Sue was better at this than I was. I have always had the idea that I could find my way and don't like asking for directions. The men may relate to this more than the mostly patient and wiser ladies!

But I believe all of you will be able to relate to undertaking a new activity or journey with anxiety which was eased as you got guidance from another person, whether a friend or stranger.

Perhaps going to high school you had a brother or a sister who had already been through the experience. Starting a new job where you found someone already there who could guide you. Becoming a new father or mother and finding someone who could be approached for help.

The passages that we are looking at give us guidance in two ways:

Firstly that when the road is rocky and seems endless you can cry out to God as David did; and

Secondly you have Jesus as your shepherd, high priest and friend.

Let us start with Psalm 22.

It starts with the words that Jesus uttered on the cross. The anguished cry of "*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.*"¹

These are the opening words of David in Psalm 22 as he cries out in prayer to God in his suffering.

David, the godly sufferer, the victim of unrelenting attacks of enemies whom he has not provoked.

Hear how he cries out:

"1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? 2 My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest."

Where are you God? Why do you not come to my aid as you did to our fathers who put their trust in you?

*"In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame."*²

I am a worm, not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me, they hurl insults at me, shaking their heads. They call out: "*he trusts in the Lord: let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him since he delights in him.*"³

¹ Matthew 27:46

² Psalm 22:4-5.

³ Psalm 22: 6-8.

Can you hear the despair of David? And can you see the prophetic words that were fulfilled when Jesus was crucified?

Listen further:

"My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. 16 Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet. 17 All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me. 18 They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment."

All of this fulfilled at the cross. No other psalm or passage describes so accurately and aptly the circumstances of Jesus at the cross.⁴

Consider quotes from Matthew?? Matt 27: 42 Luke 23:34 and 23:36.

You and I have faced, and will face, troubles and challenges in our lives here on this earth. Know this and know that we can cry out to God in our prayers as did David.

But critically know that Jesus, fully human, has been down the road, suffering more than anyone has for your sake and for mine.

Just as I mentioned that I am hesitant to ask for directions, obstinately thinking I should be able find the way without outside help, I was hesitant in accepting that I could approach Jesus just as I was. Somehow I felt that I needed to *"get my act together"* before I did this. I knew how I had stumbled and strayed – didn't I need to correct this before I called out.

Can you relate to this?

If you have felt like this, or feel like this, listen to the good news from the book of Hebrews.

You are not alone – be encouraged.

Hebrews is a book in which the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as mediator and high priest is described.

Eugene Peterson in introducing the book of Hebrews writes this:

⁴ Footnote in my NIV Study Bible page 798.

"It seems odd to have to say so, but too much religion is a bad thing. We can't get too much of God, can't get too much faith and obedience, can't get too much love and worship. But religion – the well-intentioned efforts to "get it all together" for God – can very well get in the way of what God is doing for us."

He points out that when we try to improve things instead of living in responsive obedience to God's actions revealed in Jesus, we get in the way rather than on the way.

Hebrews starts with the writer recording that in the past God spoke through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but that in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, Jesus, whom he appointed heir to all things.⁵

Jesus fully human, of the same family of men and women, of you and me and not ashamed of us. The writer quotes from Psalm 22:

*"I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you."*⁶

The humanity of Jesus is stressed:⁷

"17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."

Why is this important? It is important because Jesus himself suffered when he was tempted, and so he is able to help you and me when we are being tempted.⁸

He has been down the road further, and suffered more than any other. He is not a shepherd that will say that Spain is flat and without obstacles.

Because of this we, who share in the heavenly calling, are called on to fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.⁹

What makes Jesus different to the priests who served over all the years? We read this in chapter 10 of Hebrews:

"11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12

⁵ Hebrews 1:1-2

⁶ Psalm 22:22

⁷ Hebrews 2:17

⁸ Hebrews 2:18

⁹ Hebrews 3:1

But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”

Let us break this down.

Firstly we have the picture of priests standing, day after day. There is no end to this repeated activity of offering the same sacrifices: sacrifices that could never take away sins.

Compare this to Jesus, who having offered for all time his life as a single once-only sacrifice, sat down.

No more standing. It was done! No more repeated offering of sacrifices day after day.

Sins once forgiven will be remembered no more and there will no longer be any sacrifice for sin.¹⁰

Jesus fully God and fully man.

You are not alone: be encouraged.

I would ask you to set some time aside and read through the thirteen chapters in Hebrews in one go. It is short, some 18 pages in my bible. You will see that there are five warnings in this book:

- 📖 A warning to pay attention to God’s word – chapter 2;
- 📖 A warning against unbelief – chapter 3:7;
- 📖 A warning not to fall away – chapter 5:11;
- 📖 A warning to persevere - chapter 10:19; and
- 📖 A warning against refusing God – chapter 12:14.

Our passage from chapter 4 falls into the warning against unbelief. We read just before our passage begins:¹¹

“12 See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s

¹⁰ Hebrews 15-18.

¹¹ Hebrews 3:12-14

deceitfulness. 14 We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."¹²

A thread that runs through this book is the call to encourage one another. So important in our journey of faith. "Today" is still with us, the day of divine grace, and opportunity to trust God, and to accept Jesus as your saviour and lord. But "Today" will pass says the writer of Hebrews.

Pay attention, persevere, and be encouraged you are not alone!

In verse 11 we are urged to *"keep at it (so that we) eventually arrive at the place of rest – (don't) drop out through some sort of disobedience"*.

And this call is followed by our passage in verses 12-16 in chapter 4.

Verse 12 is well known and often quoted on its own.

*"12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires."*¹³

The reference here to "the word of God" is not only a reference to the written scriptures but to the dynamic word of God as recorded in the scriptures, active in accomplishing God's purposes.¹⁴

I spoke about not coming to God before I have my act together. As if I did not want God to see me as I am. But God's word is a living dynamic power that *"judges with an all-seeing eye, penetrating my innermost being, soul and spirit, joints and marrow"*.¹⁵ God is ahead of us, like the father waiting for the prodigal son or daughter to come home, well knowing what they have been doing.

If we are left unsure verse 13 clarifies this:

"13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable."

¹² Hebrews 3:12-14

¹³ The metaphor of God's word as a sword is also found in [Ephesians 6:17](#) includes the "sword of the Spirit" and in Revelation we read of the glorified Christ with a sword coming out of his mouth ([Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 19:15, 21](#))

¹⁴ See for example: [Psalm 107:20; psalm 147:18; Isaiah 40:8; Isaiah 56:11; Galatians 3:8; Ephesians 5:26, James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23.](#)

¹⁵ Footnote in my NIV Study Bible page 1862

An author¹⁶ says that:

"Psalm 139 can well be used to expound on this: "You discern my thoughts from far away...Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?"

And then the description of Jesus as our great high priest waiting for our approach.

We have Jesus as our great high priest who has "gone through the heavens." In Acts¹⁷ we read how Jesus, watched by his disciples, ascended through the heavens. His task of atonement here on earth completed.

And the writer of Hebrews then says that since we have a great high priest *"let us hold firmly to the faith we profess."* It is a strong call to stand firm, to persevere and not fall away.

This is emphasising what is stated in earlier verses:

"We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away."¹⁸

"And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory."¹⁹

"We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end."²⁰

You can hear the urging that we are to stand firm to the end and not drift away.

How are we to do this when we waiver, feel weak and are tempted to drift?

We are then to:

"fix our eyes on Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand

¹⁶ See: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/ordinary-28-2/commentary-on-hebrews-412-16>

¹⁷ Acts 1:9-11. 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."

¹⁸ Hebrews 2:1

¹⁹ Hebrews 3:6

²⁰ Hebrews 3:14

of the throne of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”²¹

The writer tells us that in Jesus we have a friend, an approachable priest. One who can sympathise with our weaknesses because he has experienced them. Jesus himself has shared fully in all our experiences of temptation, except that he never sinned.

Seeking help, strength and guidance from Jesus is seeking help from a shepherd who has been down the road. But far more so than the person who has been to Santiago and experienced all it took to get there. .

You are not alone – be encouraged!

And then in verse 16 the writer tells us what we are to do.

We are to approach the throne of grace with confidence. We are not to be timid. We are not to be hesitant because of anything that we have done, or not done. We are not to hesitate until we have got it together. We are to approach the throne of grace with confidence.

In the Lord’s Prayer we pray lead us not into temptation. And we should do that. But the call to approach Jesus is not just to do so before we stumble, but also after we have stumbled, given in to temptation and “blown it” in our minds. As you confess your sin and are forgiven, the slate is wiped clean.

Because of what Jesus has done for you, sin no longer has power over you and no longer impacts your relationship with God.

And why should you approach Jesus? So that you may receive mercy for your failures and grace to help in the hour of need.²²

This is the good news indeed. The fact that nothing that you have done is hidden from God is cause for hope and not despair. Jesus loves you despite what you might have done and awaits you to help you in your hour of need.

Don’t hide, or run away from God. You need to run toward God, to approach the throne of grace.

²¹ Hebrews 12:1-2

²² Hebrews 4:16 from JB Phillips translation.

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David in Psalm 22 shows how we can cry out in anguish when troubles bear down on us and do so in prayer. Listen to the words from the song "What a friend we have in Jesus":

"Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged, take it to the Lord in prayer."

The five verses in this passage from Hebrews calls on you to approach Jesus with confidence to receive mercy and grace in your hour of need.

Do so today.

You are not alone!

Gordon Hay
Trinity Presbyterian Church, Lynnwood Pretoria www.trinity.org.za
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