

Exodus 3:1-6, Hebrews 4:14-16  
“Approaching the throne with boldness”

One of the more humbling experiences for me as your pastor is what takes place every year in February when we have all of the officers together to celebrate those who are going off of their terms as leaders of the church. The recognition of officers going off is significant. The three years, or for some the six years that you have put into the life of this church and the hours that you have dedicated and devoted to this church are felt and are significant. After we recognize the officers we go into the sanctuary and we worship God. It is so humbling to me to see over 40 people who have raised their hand and said send me, use me for the service of this church over this next year.

This year I encouraged our leaders in the same way that I will be encouraging you this morning. How are we to lead? What are we to use as our guide and your direction? We cannot lead and we cannot be effective servants of the church if we do not take our guidance and our direction from our Lord. We all have ideas and we all have experiences that have contributed to the arsenal of knowledge that we have, but not all are suitable for leading the church, not all are appropriate for this context in this place and in this time. The only way that any of us, but especially leaders, are going to know what direction the Holy Spirit is leading this church is by asking our Savior that specific question. How do you want me to lead, what decisions do you want me to make. Is this now the time that I am to be silent, or do you want me to speak what I understand to be your vision for this church?

It was not that long ago that as a church we were caught up in Prayer, and Scripture, and Action. It was nice to have a theme guiding us, and that prayer component comes first for a reason. We cannot have a relationship with God if we do not pray. It is as simple as that. We are babies growing within the womb of our creator, and the umbilical chord that connects us and God is prayer. Without that, we cannot survive and we will be on our own, without a compass, and without life. But I would guess that many of us within this room are a bit puzzled by what it means to pray and what does that look like in my life, my individual life. I'm good with what we do in church, but once I'm outside of church, well, do I have to?

Today we have the sermon title “approaching the throne of grace with boldness.” Whenever you hear that term approaching the throne of grace, I know I use it and others do as well. Our author in Hebrews uses it today as well. It simply means to pray, to approach God. Today we are going to hear from Hebrews a clear appeal to recognize the importance of prayer

in the rhythms of our life, in the rhythms of any Christian life. But we find in Scripture this concept of approaching God with boldness is not very present. Moses, as we heard earlier had to take off his shoes and refused to look at God because he was afraid. Isaiah when he is called by God to lead his people says Woe is me. The tax collector in Luke refuses to look up into heaven because he knows that he is in God's presence and he is not worthy.

Every single person here today, every single person listening and watching us at home, I pray that after today recognizes that because of Jesus our Savior, because of what Jesus did on the cross, is able to come to God with confidence and boldness. Jesus made that happen. Jesus was a game changer and as a result of his presence in our lives we can come before God. It was never like that before, but it is like that now.

### **READ**

Soren Kierkegaard once said "A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer was listening." Many of us think about prayer and hearing God in a way that is exclusive and so doesn't include us in the picture. Some of us think that God only reveals himself in the supernatural. For example, your pastor, when he was a youth, audibly hearing God's voice, you've never heard God's voice audibly, so that pastor, he must have a real relationship or I'm just doing it wrong.

Very few of us hear God in ways that see clearly in Scripture. We don't see burning bushes or spinning wheels or a transfiguration. We live our lives never hearing anything which could decrease our desire or the confidence that we have to approach the throne of grace, much less with boldness. Others see this talk of healing and of miracles, it is nothing that you have ever been a part of, and so this false dichotomy exists in many of our minds that this is true Christianity, seeing the supernatural, being a part of healings and miracles, and if you aren't a part of that, well then, you are somehow relegated to the bench watching while others are playing.

Some of us think that there are certain spiritual pillars of the church and they are our designated prayers or people to whom God reveals himself on behalf of the church to them and them alone. They will do the praying, they will report back to us. I often have people who see me as the intermediary between them and God. Many of you I know may see that as well. The thought that somehow the pastor has that red phone on his desk that is a direct line to God, so He

will intercede on our behalf. Say a prayer for me pastor, not with me, not while I pray, but rather do it for me, in place of me, because God will hear your prayer and doesn't even know who I am maybe, or at least the chances of him listening to me are minimal compared to him listening to you.

Some of us might think that there is a spiritual hierarchy in this church with the pastor at the top, and then those prayers warriors, those who are know to be the prayers, but most of us are down below participating, but not in that capacity. Let others do the praying, I'll help out where I can and contribute how I can. I hope you know the direction that I am going here, this common understanding, this building up of the myth of a type of caste system within the church is rampant because people, we simply do not have a relationship with our God that we think he hears or understands us, or even wants to spend any time with us. This Scripture for today breaks down all of those myths and breaks down all of those false understandings of a hierarchy within the church and replaces it with a Savior who was one of us, who lived like us, cried like us, died like us.

Our first reading we find Moses who was a man of God and as I mentioned before was a pillar within the Hebrew faith. If there was to be a hierarchy Moses would be at the top. But notice what happens when even he is in the presence of God. I am not worthy to approach your presence. That was the understanding in the Old Testament. We were not worthy to be in the presence of God. There is a certain uniqueness to the revelation of God that is only for certain people and those people served as middle men and women between us and God. Moses was one of them.

But in the New Testament that breaks down. Something new happens with Jesus which was never the case before. In Hebrews we find described for us the parabola of faith. Jesus, the Son, who was Lord of all creation, came to earth, as the redeemer, and this Scripture lays it out for us, he passed through the heavens and was just like us, on earth, where he not only suffered but was tempted in every single way that we have been tempted in our life. He understands what you are going through.

I think this is the crux of what we misunderstand. We think we need a pastor to be our intermediary, but we don't. Jesus is the one who served as the intermediary. In our salvation we can and we should go directly to Jesus. Some of you come from traditions where the pastor is the intermediary. This is true both in Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, but also in some

churches where the pastor is the one who makes all the decisions and in some ways is seen as the intermediary. You all know me better than that so fortunately if you think I have a direct line to Christ more than you do, you haven't hung around me enough. That is not my role as pastor to be the intermediary between you and God. You are able to approach the throne of grace with confidence and boldness on your own, you need to. God wants you to.

With Jesus there is a new reality where God chose to be in constant conversation and in constant presence not just with a few hand picked people, but with all of us, if we would only approach the throne of grace. If we would only take the time to pray. Vs. 15 states that we are not alone in our weaknesses. Many of us here today think that our weaknesses are disqualifying to us being able to be in the presence of God. That couldn't be further from the truth, he shared our weaknesses and our failings and our temptations, and our bad decisions. He knows what that is like. Jesus changed everything.

Maybe you have heard this before but you simply do not know how to pray. Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, so it is not intuitive. We have to be taught. Here is what I want you to do starting today, spend 5 minutes in prayer alone, maybe take your shoes off before you pray, like Moses did, just to mark that you are daring to approach the throne of grace with boldness. Pray first for a member of this church, think of someone, anyone, and pray for them. Later in the week, tell them that you prayed for them. Then pray for a family member, let them know you prayed for them. Then pray for yourself, let yourself know how loved you are by God, and that you are approaching the throne of grace, not of judgment, not of condemnation, not of disappointment. But rather God sees you as a child, you are viewed through the lens of grace.

You do not need the supernatural in order to know that God is present in your life. In fact, Dallas Willard states that those who understand the presence of God, or God speaking to them only in terms of the supernatural have a less mature faith than those who understand that God is fully present when we just spend those five minutes with Him.

Today, fittingly, we approach the throne of grace through communion. We dare to say that Christ is present in our midst, not in a magical way, but in an everyday kind of way. Not present in these elements of bread and juice, but present within this community, in every single one of us, not just those who might be considered the pillars of the church. I want you today during communion, to practice your five minutes of prayer every day. As you eat the bread and

drink the juice think of an individual and pray for them. As you taste the bread and feel the juice in your mouth, pray for that person to yourself, or out loud. As you are preparing yourself pray for them. As you wait for the Alleluia or for the groups to finish, pray for them. I should be about five minutes.

Because we know that Jesus has been through what we have we can approach the throne of grace with boldness. Let's do so. Amen.