

Rev. Kenneth J. Rodrigue
St. John's Lutheran Church of Burlington
22 December 2024

Sermon on Hebrews 10:5-10

Worship Theme:

WHEN THE LORD COMES NEAR, HE LIFTS UP THE HUMBLLED

The frenzy of December often leaves many people feeling weighed down, stressed, depressed, and guilty. We feel stretched to the limits, and we are painfully aware of our shortcomings. But when our weaknesses humble us, Advent reminds us that God lifts up the humbled.

Sermon Theme: "What Is Written Says:"

1. Christ Came into the World
2. We Have Been Made Holy

What if the success of your Christmas celebration depended on how you feel during it? We're so close now. Christmas is only a couple days away. Maybe that excites you and you feel like you might explode if it doesn't hurry up and get here! Or maybe, like many, you're pretty tired and weary by now. You've seen Christmas in stores and have been hearing the songs for ages already, you spent countless hours addressing cards, finding and wrapping the perfect gifts, attending all the parties and concerts, and everything else the calendar and to-do list have on them. For some reason you also thought it would be a good idea to host Christmas for the family this year and now all the pressure is on to have a spotless house, decorations that everyone will "ooh" and "aah" over, and to prepare a meal that they'll still be talking about next Christmas. Let's face it: December can make us feel pretty miserable by the time we actually make it to Christmas. We've spent so long preparing for it that now that it's almost here, we hardly even want it at all.

Let's make this even bigger though. What if not just Christmas, but rather our entire Christian life depended on how we feel? It would be up to us and our thoughts and feelings to determine what truth is, what God wants, and if we're spiritually okay or not. Can you even imagine how often everything would change? Christianity would be the most subjective religion in the world, allowing anyone to think and do anything, and the consequences or benefits would be for them to decide! Christianity would be a religion of self. Even if somehow we managed to keep God in the picture, he would be and think and say and do whatever we choose, which would make him completely different for everyone. And there's certainly no comfort or confidence to be found in a God who is always changing. We would never know for sure what to do or what to expect – our confidence would be worn away to absolutely nothing.

In turn, that would completely rearrange or even destroy the power and joy of Christmas. Christmas would be the day God was born, if you believe that sort of thing can happen. Christmas would be a day God came to his people, if you think God cares about people enough to do that. Christmas would be a day when the

entire human story shifted and changed forever, if you decide that's important or necessary. But if everything depends on our feelings, then just as valid would be all the people who think and feel that God has not and never will be born, that he doesn't care about people, and that human history doesn't require or revolve around this day at all.

And that's just what it would do to Christmas. We haven't even gotten into all the things that would be different for the rest of our lives too. If we would still be willing to believe that there is a God who makes rules which he expects people to follow, would our feelings tell us we're doing a good job or a bad job? Would we be already good enough or never good enough? Would God expect more from us, and if so what kind of sacrifices, offerings, or other things might he be looking for? Or would he say that we have done more than enough already, simply by being better than many other people.

Suddenly, everything is a free-for-all: God is nothing, his Word is nothing, people can be and do whatever they want, nobody knows what God expects of us and if he wants more or less from us, the Christian life and relationship with God are robbed of all significance and meaning, and a day like Christmas is reduced to nothing more than a day of food, family, decorations, and gifts. It's a dreadfully humbling thought which would leave us feeling empty and hopeless, recognizing that if any of those things are true, then we have nothing left to stand on.

But what if our faith rests on something stronger, something much more sure and certain, something that cannot and will not be changed or affected by our constantly-changing feelings? Thankfully, that "what if" isn't a "what if" at all. Our faith DOES rest on something much more certain and secure than any fleeting feelings we ever have had, do have, may have, or will have. Our faith rests on **What is Written**. And **What Is Written** has an incredible amount to **Say**.

Hebrews chapter 10 uses **what is written** and points us to Christmas as one of the greatest, most-reassuring, and most pivotal life-changing moments in all of history: *When **Christ came into the world**. **What is written** does not depend on feelings to determine facts; it simply presents what has already happened: **Christ came into the world**.* In a couple days we have the privilege of celebrating again the incomparably wonderful fact that God kept the promise he made back near the beginning of time, to do something he had planned back in eternity, that would affect the human race for the remainder of time and eternity, which means all time and even all timelessness has been centered on the event we celebrate later this week: ***Christ came into the world**.*

And **What is written** tells us that he came for a very specific purpose. Jesus did not come to do whatever he felt was right or whatever people asked him to do. No, Jesus came very specifically to do what God the Father had determined and revealed hundreds, even thousands of years before: *Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, "Here I am – **it is written** about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will."* What was that will? God's will was that Jesus Christ, the 2nd person of the Holy Triune God, would enter into this world as a

human being, born at Christmas with a body prepared for one purpose: to be the ultimate sacrifice and offering, *once for all*. Everything that had been revealed and written about the Savior was now coming true. All the sacrifices and offerings of God's Old Testament believers had pointed ahead to this very moment, this very Christ. ***What is written said Christ came into the world, so he did.***

Because Jesus came into the world at Christmas with the one and only purpose of completing his Father's will and accomplishing **what was written** about him, Christ has removed our feelings from the conversation of Christianity. Not because our feelings are unimportant or because they have no place here – in fact, we have a great many feelings and emotions as a result of how much Jesus has changed what we see and hear and know and experience in life. Rather, our feelings are now labeled as “unable to change the eternal status given by Christ.”

When Christ came into the world to do what is written, saying “I have come to do your will,” he made it clear that *by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* Think back to the thoughts we had before about how we feel in December and just a few days before Christmas. As you were thinking about how you feel, was “holy” one of the words that crossed your mind? Whether it was or wasn't, it can be! As we draw nearer to Christmas and are humbled both by the recognition of our sinful unworthiness and by the countless demands on our time and energy during the holidays, we can also remember that **What is written** says something else about us. It no longer says we're sinful or unworthy; rather, **we have been made holy**, sinless, and worthy in God's sight. In our final hours of preparation, God has again lifted up the humbled!

While December continues to be one of the busiest months for many of us, remember why we have so much preparation and celebration in December in the first place. As we look ahead to coming to church not just once, but two or even three times this week, remember what and whom we're celebrating. God created us as beings who have tremendous feelings and emotions, and certainly we expect to feel a lot of them this week, and what a gift that is! Yet we do so with confidence and certainty, knowing that not one of our feelings (positive, negative, or otherwise) can change **What is written**.

As we gather together for worship multiple times this week, don't expect to hear something new or something you've never heard before. Instead, come fully expecting to hear the same beautiful unchanging message that causes us to celebrate and rejoice every year: **What is written still says: Christ came into the world, and therefore we have been made holy.** That makes our Christmas celebration and our entire lives as God's people the most successful and blessed they can possibly be! All praise and honor and glory and thanks to our gracious God forever and ever. Amen!

And the peace of God which goes beyond all understanding will guard and keep our hearts and our minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.