

Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

Approach the Throne of Grace with Confidence!

Most universities today treat your kids' records like they were state secrets. Because your son or daughter is a legal adult, they won't tell you their grades or anything else, unless your child signs a release. It doesn't matter if you're paying the bills. It's private information. Today, we have with us the choir from Huron Valley Lutheran High School. Do you young people ever wish that HVL did the same thing with your report cards? Have you ever been afraid to show mom or dad what you got in calculus or world history? Have you ever been afraid to tell them something that happened at school? Why? Because they might not be happy about it, right? Guess what? It isn't just high school students who are afraid to talk to authority figures. Have you adults ever been afraid to go into the boss's office? Most of us probably have experienced that. It can be very hard to talk to an authority figure. How do we feel about going to God? God invites us to come to him with all our sins and all our problems. There is no greater authority anywhere in the universe, and in our lesson from the book of Hebrews, he reminds us of that authority when he speaks of approaching his throne. But he also reminds us of something far more important: it's a throne of grace. For us, God's authority is not something to be afraid of. God tells us today: **approach the throne of grace with confidence!**

I.

The person on that throne is a king. We've all seen movies or TV shows in which someone approaches a king's throne. They can't come in until they're allowed. They're announced. Quite often, when they leave, they back away because it would be rude to turn your back on a king. Of course, in real life, an audience with a king is designed to make you feel inferior, even nervous – if you ever get the chance to approach the throne at all. The truth is, even in small countries, very few people ever meet the king themselves. But you get to come in to the King of universe, personally and regularly. My friends, **approach the throne of grace with confidence! Jesus has cleared the way.**

You're not some outsider begging to get in. You are the King's own child and you can come in any time you want to. Now, how do we actually approach God's throne? Obviously, for right now, we can't do it physically. When we die, we will stand in the presence of God. When Jesus returns, we will rise and live with him forever. But for right now, it doesn't work that way. Yet, God has given us a way to approach him: every time we pray, we go to our Father in heaven. He invites us to come in boldly, even confidently. How did we get such great privileges? The verses right before our text remind us that we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

In the covenant God made with Israel, the central job of the high priest was to come into God's presence for the people. God designed the temple to keep the people away from him. He taught them to think of him as being in the inner most part of the temple, which he called the Most Holy Place. Then he built walls and curtains to keep everyone out. To this day, we often build our churches with communion rails to imitate this setup. The idea is that when we face the altar and space above it, we're facing God. So this inner part – the chancel – is like the Most Holy Place. The outer part – the nave – is where the people are. But there's a big difference here: you can see the altar. Our communion rail isn't a wall that blocks your sight. There's no curtain here to hide the presence of God. Why? Because Jesus is the true high priest.

All those Jewish high priests were just symbols of him. None one of them could get us in to God. They came in and offered prayers and sacrifices in the people's name. But they could only do that once a year, and only after they sacrificed for their own sin. Jesus is better. He had no sin to pay for. When he came into God's true presence in heaven, he offered him the perfect life and the innocent death that he lived and died to pay for our sin. Do you remember what happened at the moment that Jesus died on the cross? The curtain that blocked that Most Holy Place was torn in two. God was saying that there is no longer any reason for us to stay out. Jesus has brought us all in. So when we approach God, we are truly approaching the throne of grace. We are truly coming to God who is the king, but the King our Father. We are coming to someone who always gives us his full attention, who always hears and always answers us. We know that, because Jesus brings us in to him.

II.

So when Jesus returns, we will live with him. When we die, our souls will go to be with him. But this part of the book of Hebrews is concerned about our life here while we wait for that moment to come. All our ministry works the same way. Once you die, there's nothing more that I can do for you. But while you live here, you need to be ministered to. That's when coming before God can seem scary. So while you are here, **approach the throne of grace with confidence! Jesus promises mercy and grace.**

I just finished reading a book about the Evangelical movement in the United States. It was written by a man who grew up Evangelical. His father was a pastor. But he is my worst nightmare because he has completely turned his back on the church of his youth. Why? Because every day of his life, his church and his parents made him feel guilty. They were so afraid of the temptations of modern society that they demanded a Christian life from him without building the faith that a Christian life flows from. They hammered away with the law. And for years, he tried to be the son they wanted. Again and again, he recommitted himself to Christ. But he couldn't stop sinning. He couldn't stop questioning the things his parents told him. In the end, he seems to have lost his faith and joined a liberal church that denies most of what God says. Many times while I was reading that book, I wanted to stop because it irritated my greatest fears as a Christian parent and as a pastor. Do we only make you feel guilty? There is no hope in that. A true Christian life does not flow from guilt. It flows from grace, from knowing that your Savior shed his blood to take your guilt away. It flows from peace and joy in the Lord. Because I do preach the law regularly, that book made me tremble just a little bit.

God gives us grace. His throne can be a throne of judgment to those who refuse to repent. God will condemn them to hell forever. He does require his ministry to preach the law, both to show us what a new life looks like and to remind us of why we need Christ. But do we preach too much law? Do I spend too little time on Jesus and too much time on why we need him? Do you hear the good news that Jesus is your Savior here? The devil is clever. If he can't get you to say, "I don't care what God says, I'm going live my own life," his alternate approach is to say, "You sinner! You're just not good enough. God will never be happy with you." That kind of despair leads either to self-destruction and suicide, or it leads to giving up your faith, because you can't stand a god like that.

But grace makes all the difference. What is grace? It's a gift that God gives us, not because we're good enough, but just because he loves us. Who do we give gifts to? Every Christmas, you buy presents for your spouse and your children and your parents. You celebrate the birthdays of your friends and family. In just a few weeks, it's going to be Valentine's Day, and many of the young people who are singing for us this morning will buy gifts for the young lady or young man that they spend so much time with. Would you buy a gift for someone who hates you? When I was serving my last church, not far from where we lived, two neighbors clearly disliked each other. All along their property line, they had erected No Trespassing signs facing each other's house. So imagine one winter morning, they both come out at the same time, and one can't get his car to start. What are the odds that the other one will give him a ride to work? We give gifts to people who love us, to people we think deserve it.

But grace is God's undeserved love. He gave us Jesus when we were still rebels. He gave us Jesus even though we didn't want him. We're all born sinners and every day, we earn God's wrath. But he sent his Son to die so that we will live. Every day that we feel guilty, every time our heart hurts because we haven't lived the way God calls us to, every time we ignore the needs of the poor, or fight with our spouse, or put our children or our parents in second place and do what we want – every single time, God gives us grace. It's not possible for you to sin more than God will forgive you. Jesus has taken all your sin away. Because God loves you, he sends guys like me to hear your confession and assure you of his grace.

And we go to the throne of grace for one more thing: mercy. There's a difference between grace and mercy. I can do nothing to earn God's grace. He just chooses to love me. But I absolutely earn his mercy. Why? Because mercy is having compassion on someone in trouble. Every stupid thing I do that brings trouble and pain down on my own head, every hurt and sorrow of this life that I suffer, every disaster that blows up in my face and every tear I shed, causes God to feel mercy for me. Mercy is what you feel when the news shows you pictures of child starving after an earthquake or in a war zone. Their hurt touches your heart and you want to help.

But most people can't keep that up. They get mercy fatigue. But God's mercy never ends. What hurts the most in your life right now? Is it the fact that you won't have anyone to buy a Valentine's Day gift for? Is

it arguments with your parents? Is it fear about what you will do with your life? Is it failure at work or at home or in your marriage? Is it health issues or money issues? God sees our hurt and he loves us. When we approach the throne of grace, Jesus himself whispers in his Father's ear and says, "This is one of ours. This is one that we claimed in baptism. We must listen and help." And the Father never disagrees.

No matter how God answers, it always reflects his grace and mercy. He loves you and your pain moves him to help. He loves you, even when you're being ugly and unchristian and undeserving. He loves you and he gave his Son for you and he will never leave you in this life. He may allow hurt to come for your good. But he loves you and does all things to bring you home to him in heaven.

We don't always have the courage to go to people for help. That's ironic because in most of our lives, there are people who are literally aching to have us come to them. Parents wish their children would just tell them what's wrong. Spouses wish their husband or wife would just open up about whatever it is. But we cheat ourselves. Even worse than that, we cheat ourselves with God. Come to throne of grace. He loves you. There's nothing you can say to him that will surprise him. Come and get grace and peace over your sins. Come and get mercy in all that you struggle with. Come with confidence because he loves you so much that he sent his Son to die for you. He will never turn you away. Amen.