

Scripture

Daniel 12:1-3

The Resurrection of the Dead

12 "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of anguish, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Psalm 16

1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

2 I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you."

3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble,
in whom is all my delight.

4 Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names upon my lips.

5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.

6 The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
I have a goodly heritage.

7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I keep the Lord always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.

10 For you do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.

11 You show me the path of life.
In your presence there is fullness of joy;
in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25

11 And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single

sacrifice for sins, “he sat down at the right hand of God,” 13 and since then has been waiting “until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

A Call to Persevere

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Sermon:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Are you familiar with what a mic drop is? It’s popular with rappers, comedians, and other performers – it’s a gesture of supreme confidence and finality. This is what it looks like: at the end of a performance or verbal exchange of some kind, the performer says something particularly incisive or witty, then in an exaggerated motion drops the mic on the floor.

This action signifies that nothing more can be said. It is an action that communicates that there is no response or refutation possible, that the performer claims the last word. It’s a bold move, because it’s irrevocable.

Normally we associate the mic drop with performers with a bit of an edge, like Eddy Murphy or Johnny Rotten, but it was actually Judy Garland who did the first recorded mic drop in 1965, as she exited the stage on the Ed Sullivan show, and its resurging popularity today can be traced back to President Obama in 2012.

The reason we’re talking about mic drops is that Jesus had a mic drop moment in our reading from the letter to the Hebrews we heard this morning.

As Deb read, ‘all the other priests through history day after day offered again and again the same sacrifices that could never take away sins.’ I preached only a few weeks ago about this same cycle of sin and sacrifice, sin and sacrifice, where the sacrifice never really absolves the sin and the same behaviour repeats itself endlessly to no avail.

This changed with the arrival of Jesus. Jesus was pure, holy – of God. Jesus was sinned against by men who had no regard for him. He was betrayed, tortured, and killed. Jesus took all of this

sin upon himself, he bore the scars of others' hatred in his flesh, but he did not return sin for sin. Jesus broke that cycle of sin; our sin stopped in his flesh.

Jesus stepped outside of our usual chain of behaviour, and then astoundingly he offered forgiveness – telling a broken humanity that we don't need to be bound by our past sins but that we are invited instead to begin again. We are no longer prisoners to sin, bound by our past behaviours, but free to choose the life of grace and love that God always intended for us.

The author of Hebrews wrote that once Jesus offered his one time single sacrifice that released all of humankind from their perpetual bondage, he sat down at the right hand of God, and put his feet up, as his enemies were prepared to be his footstool.

I picture Jesus reclining back with his hands behind his head, a smile of satisfaction and contentment on his face.

This is his mic drop moment. Centuries of sin and failure, frustration and futility, servitude to sin - then Jesus' one moment was sufficient to change the course of the world and make everything else superfluous. The living word is the last word, nothing more needs to be said – nothing else can be said.

How then, do we react? What do we do when we encounter this final word from God?

The author of Hebrews gives us a two-part response: confidence, and conversion. He writes 'we now have the confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus.' The sanctuary is the holy place in which God dwells – because of Jesus' mic drop moment we are able to approach God, not without respect, but without fear stemming from who we are.

Jesus' actions paved the path to God so that we are not held back by our own unrighteousness, but we are able to come to God because of Jesus' righteousness.

With this confidence, we can come before God with true hearts – cleansed of our evil conscience, which is that soul-crushing guilt that leads to death and despair. We can claim our new lives, though not from our own doing – it's not our own faith that gives us this confidence.

How many times have we promised to do better and found ourselves back in the mud the very next day? Our own faithfulness, though we may start with the best of intentions, will usually fail.

Our confidence is not the product of our own faithfulness, but due to the faithfulness of God - the faithfulness of Jesus, the faithfulness of the one who never sleeps nor slumbers, the one who is perfect.

We have gained the confidence to enter into God's presence fully, knowing that we are not just tolerated by God, but actually desired and loved by God. We are invited to luxuriate in God's loving and accepting presence. But let us not get stuck there.

This brings us to our second response – once we have the confidence, we then need to seek conversion.

When I say conversion I'm not using the word as many in the church do. I don't just mean that we pray a prayer to Jesus and then check off Christian on census forms and go around asking other people if they have been saved.

When I say conversion I mean that we are actually changed into something that we were not before – there is a transmutation or transformation that takes place – something substantive is altered within us.

In the bible, we read that many people who experience an encounter with God receive new names. The change in them is so profound that they can no longer be called what they were before. They are new people.

This is the kind of conversion that I believe we as Christians ought to expect in our lives. Some of you may counter that since you have always been Christians you don't have any particular conversion moment that you can point to. To that I would respond that conversion is not a one-time event, but a process. As living Christians we are all engaged in conversion all the time.

Perhaps instead of thinking that we have been given a new life it would be more helpful for us to consider that we have been given a renewing life. I continually fall short of my own and God's expectations – certainly I fall short of my wife's expectations. As such I have a constant need of redemption and reformation – I need to continually come to the fountain for renewal.

What are the practical ways in which to come to the fountain for renewal? In the church we have many phrases that sound wonderful, but that we have no idea of how to put into practice.

Fortunately for us, the author gives us some very concrete steps that will help us practice conversion. He writes 'And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.'

There are some very good tips in here, not the least of which is to make sure that we meet together and encourage one another. We are a church together, not alone.

There was one combination of words that struck me as I read the preceding passage, and I hope it jumped out at you as well. The phrase was 'provoke one another to love and good deeds.'

Provoke is a curious word to use. I would have expected to hear encourage, inspire, exhort, embolden, or galvanize. Provoke has a lot of negative connotations; we don't think of provoking someone to love, we more often provoke people to anger. I don't recall my mother ever congratulating me for provoking my brother, it was always something I was scolded for.

And it's not as though this word was just translated awkwardly. The Greek word *paroksysmos* means stimulation, provocation, incitement, irritation, or dispute. Strong's defines *paroksysmos* as 'a provocation which literally jabs or cuts someone so they "must" respond.'

Now that's a harsh word. In some ways it makes sense – we are more often moved into action through the avoidance of pain than the pursuit of pleasure – we often need to be prodded. I have a plaque that I kept on my desk for a number of years that said 'Remember, a kick in the butt is a step forward.'

But it's still an odd phrasing to hear in the bible, that we are called to become irritants for one another, provoking each other to love and good deeds.

This provides us with an interesting view of the church – one that I suspect may be novel to many of us. The church community gathers, in part, for the purpose of incitement and agitation.

Not so much to protest and call out the wicked ways of the world, though there are times that will be necessary. We are to provoke each other within the church. This means that the church is not meant to primarily be a place where everyone plays nice and gets along, but a place where our duties to each other include difficult, perhaps contentious, wrestling with what it means to act in love and justice. We are to stir up and - if necessary - irritate each other into fulfilling our baptismal vows to renounce the ways of evil and embrace a new life marked by forgiveness, justice, peace, and generosity.

This is not a licence to become insensitive – stay on guard for that. Remember the words of Paul: If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

We are to provoke to love, in love. This is no easy task; it requires wisdom, compassion, empathy, and understanding.

I saw on the PCC Facebook page an admonition that we in the church would do well to learn from the motto of the medical profession – first, do no harm. As we provoke each other this is a good starting point, that our motivation is not to tear down but to build up. This means that our provocations ought to serve the best interests of the person we are addressing, not our own interests.

We will find that at times we do this poorly; there will be much forgiveness needed as we walk this path – fortunately we have been well equipped for exactly that.

I can't tell you exactly how we are to provoke – as it will be different in every circumstance.

But let these words settle into your heart as a guiding principle.

Provoke to love, in love.

And may the Spirit of truth lead you into all truth, give you grace to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, and to proclaim the word and works of God; and the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit remain upon you.

Amen.