

INTERNATIONAL SUNDAY

August 14, 2022

Overarching Theme: 2022 – *The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Luke 4:19)

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

As the world awakens from 2 years of pandemic stupor, the words of Jesus proclaiming “the year of the Lord’s favor” is a message whose time has come. This passage from Luke 4 harkens back to the ‘year of jubilee’ of Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61, a year of a fresh start, a clean slate and reset for everyone who can envision new *possibilities* with God this year.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Hebrews 10:19-25 NIV

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Commentary:

This passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the several exhortations of the Author to those he first wrote this epistle to, who were Christians from the Jewish background and were in danger of slipping back into Judaism. Therefore, this epistle interprets the Old Testament, explaining many Jewish practices as symbols that prepared the way for Christ and explains how Christ is the final and perfect revelation of God, far superior to all that came before.

The exhortation is based on two blessings for the believer because of Christ and they are: ‘having confidence’ and ‘having a great priest.’ These two blessings have

significance in that they counsel and call the believer to a threefold spiritual action which the Author puts forward with the words 'let us' and they are: 1) Let us draw near to God; 2) Let us hold unswervingly; and 3) Let us consider how we may spur one another. The first counsel and call centers on faith, the second on hope, and the third on love.

The two blessings for the believer of 'having confidence' and 'having a great priest' is the result of Jesus' self-giving on the cross with the offering of his blood on their behalf because of which they are able to enter into the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place, where God dwells and where Christ now is. Unlike in the past when the Jewish worshipers were left outside while the high priest would go in on their behalf and they would wait for his coming out again, now through Christ all obstacles have been removed to make way for complete and permanent access to God which is done through faith and obedience, as Jesus himself did and by which he inaugurated and established the new covenant between humanity and God. Based on this truth is the threefold counsel and call given. The first counsel and call is to draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith and the purpose for this undoubtedly is to worship the living God; preparation for this is by total inner cleansing by Christ, symbolized by his shed blood, and outer expression of this is through Baptism, symbolized by water. The second counsel and call is to hold unswervingly to hope which is the sure steadfast anchor of the soul and which brings about faithfulness; this faithfulness finds strength not in self but in God who is trustworthy and faithful in keeping promises. The third counsel and call is to consider how to spur one another to love and good deeds which is an act that may come across as negative as in irritating and pestering another but it is put across in a positive way as of disturbing the apathy and fear in another so as to encourage practical Christian living.

The third counsel and call to consider how to spur one another is expressed in strong terms because of the reason the Christians to whom the Author was writing to were becoming inattentive, neglectful, and were drifting from following Christ, particularly in gathering together for worship and acts of mutual support. The reason for this are not given here but later in the epistle we have hints which point to fear of persecution, heresy, feeling the group is not essential to personal faith, leadership tensions, and discouragement over the delay of the return of Christ. The last reason is specifically addressed here with the Author mentioning to encourage one another, all the more because of the surety of the Day of the Lord or the day of Christ's coming again and judgment. The Author's exhortation in this passage is due to these reasons making these Christians to return to Judaism which they had moved on from to greater understanding and faith in God's purposes fulfilled through Christ Jesus.

- Adapted from The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary, Vol XII, pp. 119-21.

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. Like these Christians in danger of slipping back into Judaism and therefore being reminded of who Christ is and what they have received and become because of him, are there dangers for Christians today in your context which we need to be cautioned against and encouraged in Christ?
2. In what way is Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the new covenant superior to the temple ritual of animal sacrifice and the old covenant? Was the temple ritual and the old covenant wrong or not necessary?
3. How would you see the Author of Hebrew's threefold counsel and call centered on faith, hope, and love together with Paul's teaching on faith, hope, and love in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13?
4. What may be the reasons for today's Christians becoming inattentive, neglectful, and drifting from following Christ, particularly in gathering together for worship and acts of mutual support? What are the barriers that keep Christians from worshipping and fellowshiping together across cultural and ethnic, socio-economic, and tradition-denominational backgrounds?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV
²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.