

Hebrews 2:9-18 *But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. ¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered. ¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

"I just can't wait to get home!" That was the comment one of my girls made this past week in looking forward to coming home this coming week. There's just something about being at home, isn't there? It doesn't matter if we are away at school or just at work for a busy day or out enjoying what our area has to offer...there's just something about being at home. It's more than enjoying the comfort of your own bed or pillow. Home is a place where you feel comfortable. You are familiar with the surroundings. Home is where you feel safe and are surrounded by people who love and care for you. Home is where you feel like can be yourself and get away from other people. You can relax and be refreshed. There's just nothing quite like being at home.

Of course, not everyone feels that way about home. For those who grew up in situations of abuse or neglect, thinking about being home might not bring back good thoughts or feelings. Sibling rivalries or spousal fights can make home an extremely uncomfortable place to be. A rebellious, undisciplined child can make home a scary place. For people who grew up in homes like these or who even now live in homes like these, the thought of home might bring out feelings of sadness, loneliness or even lovelessness.

Our focus today is simple: Welcome home! Does this place feel like home to you? That's an interesting question because thinking about this place of worship as home might conjure up some of the same thoughts and feelings inside of you as being at your home would. Some might answer with a resounding, "Absolutely this feels like home. There are people I love and who love me. I feel comfortable and safe being here and gathering with all these other people." Truth be told, some of you might answer exactly the opposite: "Home? No this doesn't feel like home. It never has. I feel more like a stranger here. I feel judged and looked down upon. Sometimes, I feel like I'm unnoticed or even unwanted."

In many places throughout Scripture including in this lesson from Hebrews 2, God speaks about the reality that when we gather for worship, we are at home because we are with our spiritual family. In our time together this morning, we want to listen as God encourages us to treasure the spiritual family that we share together. He reminds us that not only is Jesus our brother, but our fellow Christians are also our brothers and sisters. We pray that God the Holy Spirit this morning would not only renew us and restore us but help us to be the family his Word says we are. As we continue to live and work and worship together, we pray God would help us grow in developing this family atmosphere where we are all comfortable to gather and worship and where we support and love one another as brothers and sisters. **Welcome Home!**

This section of God's Word tells us something remarkable: the eternal God of the universe is our brother! We want to be home in God's house because this is where our brother is. The author had spent the entire first chapter of this book recalling the superiority of God's Son over all things, even the angels. To think that the one who is the "*radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being*" would call himself our brother is mind-blowing. Yet one of the blessings that comes with family is being willing to do whatever is necessary to show love to one another. And this is exactly what we see from our brother, Jesus.

This is what he was willing to do for us: He was willing to be "*made lower than the angels for a little while.*" We are about ready to celebrate at Christmas Jesus' willingness to follow the will of his heavenly Father and come down to this earth to live in our place. It's really amazing to think that the Triune God who lived in the pristine, sinless heaven was willing to come down to this dumpster called earth to search through the filth and rubbish of this fallen world for you and me. He chose to set aside the full use of his divine power and glory and subject himself to walk in our shoes. And he didn't do this for an extended weekend or a week or two vacation. He lived here for 33 years allowing himself to grow and learn and mature as we do. He allowed himself to face want and hurt and sorrow and pain. He lived as we do for 33 years.

All this he did so that he could "*bring many sons to glory.*" To bring glory to his people, he not only had to live perfectly in our place, but he also had to take our sin upon himself and die the death we deserved to die for our sins. Our text tells us he "*tasted death for everyone.*" It's really quite amazing. He not only humbled himself to come down to this earth to live with us, he humbled himself by being willing to take our suffering and die so that we could enjoy his glory. Let's put this into a little perspective. Imagine being younger and your brother refused to drink his milk at dinner. Your mom insisted that he drink it before he was allowed to go outside and play. But he stubbornly refused. He sat there until the milk was warm and not the least bit pleasant to drink. Who of us would have volunteered to drink that big glass of warm milk for our brother to free him from the dinner table? I'm guessing that very few of us would have been willing to drink it. You're probably a little grossed out right now just thinking about it! Yet, your brother Jesus was willing to drink the dregs of death for us so that we could live with him forever! To make sure that his sacrifice was complete, Jesus willingly suffered in our place. Our text tells us he was made "*perfect through what he suffered.*" In other words, his willingness to suffer made him complete as our Savior. He was willing to give himself to suffering and even death so that we could be made holy before him. What a Savior we have! What a brother who would do this for us!

Here's the bombshell: Because Jesus was not only holy himself but the one who made us holy, he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters. Many people are ashamed of their families. Maybe your father is the town drunk. Maybe your mother is a

mess. Maybe your sister has known too many men. Maybe your brother has been in trouble with the law more times than you could count. You are ashamed of them. You are ashamed to admit your relationship with them. You are ashamed of what others might think of you if they knew that you were related to them. If ever there was a brother who had a right to be ashamed of his siblings, it is Jesus. Because of our sin, he ought to have disowned us long ago. He ought to hang his head in shame at even knowing us! But that isn't what he did. No, he was the one who made us perfect through his suffering. He isn't ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters because he did what was necessary to make us perfect. Not only is he not ashamed of us, he is proud to call us brothers and sisters.

And that brother who did what was necessary to make us perfect and who proudly claims us as his brothers and sisters is here with us this morning. This is why we love coming to God's house. Our brother is here to sing praises to the heavenly Father with us and to give us the gifts he won for us through his suffering and death. Listen to what he said in our text, "*I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.*" Even as we praise him, he is here with us singing praise to his Father. Through His Word and Sacraments as they are shared with us, he gives to us forgiveness for our sins so we need never fear his anger. He gives to us the promise of eternal life so we never fear death. He gives to us his strength so that we need never fear temptation. When we enter his house, he insists on feeding us what we need to sustain our spiritual lives. He knows precisely what our needs are and provides the spiritual nourishment to meet those needs through Word and Sacrament. This is why being in God's house is so important. It's easy to fall into the thought, "I don't need to go to church to be a Christian." And that's true enough. You can read God's word at home and know of his forgiveness and love. But what you miss out on is the blessings your brother gives to you in Holy Communion. There he gives to you personally the body and blood given and shed for you. There he offers to you personally that forgiveness which he won for you. There God comes to you and personally announces his love for you. It's no wonder we love coming to God's house to visit our brother, Jesus. He has blessings beyond imagination to give to us every time we come here!

As great as those blessings are, let's not lose sight of the blessing we also have when we gather in God's house with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. When we gather weekly with our fellow believers in God's house to worship him, it ought to feel like coming home! And for many of us, we have that feeling. Many of us have had many wonderful experiences with God's house and our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. We found caring and supportive brothers and sisters who have walked with us and helped us navigate the challenges of life. We treasure the warmth and welcome we receive every time we walk into God's house. But others have not. Others have experienced unloving attitudes and actions from their fellow Christians. Maybe you've experienced this: no one greeted you when you walked in, no one missed you when you were gone for awhile, no one offered to help and support you during a difficult time, no one thanked you for some special gift or service you offered, people looked at you crossly when your child acted up during worship, people downplayed your idea or even outright laughed at you when you spoke up, and you can probably add many other things to this list. Like family at home, sometimes we get so comfortable at home that we aren't afraid to let our ugly out at people and we forget how unloving that can be. Sometimes, our standoffish culture finds its way into church also and we purposefully keep our distance from one another and tend more toward isolation.

This Welcome Home Sunday gives us the opportunity to repent of our sins against our brothers and sisters. We have the opportunity to beg forgiveness today from Christ and from one another for the unkind thoughts, hurtful words, self-serving actions and unloving responses. We can admit that we have gotten way too upset about something so silly as how to do this or that. We can admit that we are too selfish at times to consider how our words or actions may have impacted others. We can admit that we get too busy serving ourselves and running with our own ideas that we lost sight of serving others around us. For all the ways we have failed to be the brothers and sisters God has called us to be...we repent.

Thankfully, our brother, Jesus, is right there to assure us that he forgives us. He assures that he came into this world the first time in Bethlehem to suffer for our sins and pay the punishment we deserve. He assures us He sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts to call us into his family, give us his perfection and hold before our eyes the certainty of eternal life.

With that forgiveness from Jesus, we look now for opportunities to show the same love and forgiveness to the fellow members of our church family. It lead us to ask the questions: Who is hurting? Who needs help? How can I serve? What can I do? God has brought us into this spiritual family so that we can love and serve each other. God has given us this spiritual family to support and encourage each one of us as we look forward to Jesus' return. Every single person is important. Every single person is loved. This attitude of love and service to our brothers and sisters creates the kind of home we all long for. It makes this a place where we can find encouragement as we face an increasingly hostile world, hope when we feel hopeless and help when we feel helpless.

Can you be a Christian without going to church? Technically, yes, you can. There are those who because of physical ailments or others issues are unable to come to God's house. But when we consider who is here when we gather together—our brother Jesus and our Christian brothers and sisters, we might ask, "But why wouldn't we want to go?" We are not wired to exist as rugged individuals. We need one another. God designed us to be this way and God's design is for us to be family in Christ. What blessings God brings to us through our Spiritual family!

It's my prayer that God would lead everyone one of us to see these blessings he brings through our spiritual family and lead each one of us to do all that we can to love and support each other. Get to know one another better and on a deeper, spiritual level. Look for ways that you can help and encourage one another. If you've been hurt before, remember that while Christians are sinful and will fail you at times, Christ never will. Be willing to offer the forgiveness that offers to you to those who failed you and then move forward together letting the past be the past and supporting each other going forward. There's nothing quite like being at home! May God lead us to create that loving family atmosphere here. Welcome Home! Amen.