

“Lest We Drift Away”

Hebrews 2:1-13, Proper 22-B, Pentecost 19

Oct 4, 2015

When I was growing up in Daytona Beach, Florida with friends, one thing that always made our time at the beach much more fun and enjoyable was for each of us to have one of those large, air-inflated, life rafts that were most always two-toned in color, yellow on one side and blue on the other! They were made out of a heavy piece of canvas with a rope securely attached to them because that rope was carefully threaded through some brass eyelets on every side of the raft. Every so often on our way to the beach we would stop off at a gas station and fill our life rafts rock-hard solid with air! Then we would go over to the ocean and ride the waves. But something rather unusual would happen every time we did so. When we came up out of the water after being out there an hour or two, we noticed that our beach chairs, our towels, and our cooler full of ice water (that we had left up there on the beach) were totally out of sight, may be 50 or 100 yards away!

How did they move? Did someone move them? Was there some group of kids on the beach that day that were maybe playing some type of sick joke on us by moving all of our stuff? Heavens, no! For what had actually happened is that we were being pulled along by the ocean's currents that were causing us to drift down shore or perhaps even further out to sea; but the worst part was that we didn't even realize what was happening!

In my preparing this message, I came across a true story about a man who told of a time when he was a teenager, aboard a small fishing boat on the Colorado River with his 21 year old brother, not all that far actually from the Hoover Dam! Unfortunately the outboard motor on their boat first sputtered and then completely died. Of course, his older brother tried to get that outboard motor restarted, but no matter how fervently he had tried to do so it was all to no avail! All the while they were drifting closer to the dam, even passing the signs that said: **“Danger! Do not pass this point!”**

That's when his older brother in the back of the boat yelled out to him, **“Throw the anchor into the water!”** He did and it went down into the water, but unfortunately the other end of the rope was not attached to the boat! So down went the anchor until it completely disappeared; with the boat they were on continuing to drift all the while closer and closer to the Hoover Dam and to danger! **By the grace of God, as they later assessed the whole situation, the older brother eventually was able to get the outboard motor restarted while they were drifting,** so that they could turn the boat around and head back up the river to safety and to higher ground!

Brothers and sisters, the writer of our second Scripture lesson today is reminding every one of us how important it is to have a spiritual anchor tied securely to our spiritual lives to also keep us from drifting unnecessarily away from our God!

Drifting is not just something that can happen to us in the physical realm but in the spiritual realm also. Just as there are currents in the ocean, a river a lake that can all work to pull us away from our present location, the same thing can happen to us as believers on our spiritual lives!

1. There is first of all the riptide of our own sin.

Without our even realizing it, we can slowly be drifting away from our God in ways that are very subtle also!

This letter of Hebrews, we know, was written by an anonymous writer to a second-generation of Jewish Christians who had all received Jesus Christ as the Lord and the Savior of their lives, but because of growing persecutions they were experiencing from their own family members, and from an even greater growing threat of persecution, soon to be brought against them by the Roman Emperor Nero; these recent converts to the Christian faith were all now being tempted to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ and to embrace once again the Old Covenant that God had established with Moses at Mount Sinai and the whole Mosaic religious and sacrificial system.

This is why the writer of Hebrews is seeking to firmly establish for his readers the superiority of Jesus Christ over against the Old Testament prophets, and over against the angels created by God in every way. Let me refresh your memory about the way that this powerful letter starts out back in Hebrews 1:1-4. Here we read: **“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our father by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the Word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is BETTER than theirs!”**

For this reason, the word **“better”** is actually used **13 times in this letter** as the writer sets out to show the superiority of Jesus Christ and his salvation over against the Old Covenant and the Hebrew religious system. In **Hebrews 1:4** we read, **“Christ is better than the angels.”** In **Hebrews 7:10** we read that he is **the Mediator of a “better” covenant**, which according to **Hebrews 8:6**, was established upon **“better promises” (Hebrews 8:6).**

Another word that is repeated often is the word “**perfect**” or “**complete.**” In the original Greek it is used **14 times**. This perfection could never be accomplished by the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:11) or by the law (Hebrews 7:19), nor could the blood of animal sacrifices achieve it (Hebrews 10:1). But the writer tells us in Hebrews 10:14 that “**Jesus Christ gave himself as one offering for sin, and by this he has perfected forever them that are sanctified.**”

When in verse 10 our text says that founder of our salvation was made “**perfect through suffering**” it uses the same word that our Lord spoke from the cross when he said, “**It is finished**” (John 19:30); **THAT OUR SALVATION IS NOW A FINISHED WORK!**

The worst part is that we can be drifting from our God and his Word and not even realize it! Let me share with you just a few Biblical examples.

(1) **Think of Samson.** Samson took a strict vow before God as a Nazarite, yet we read in **Judges 16:20** that he slowly drifted away, where it says of Samson: “**He did not know that the Lord had left him.**”

(2) **Even of King Solomon, for all of his faithfulness and humility to God at the beginning of his reign** eventually veered away from God’s path in the second-half of his life here on earth. Of Solomon, we read **4 times in I Kings 11:“His heart moved away from the Lord!”**

(3) Perhaps you remember the words of the exalted Christ to the **church at Ephesus** in **Revelation 2:3-4?** “**I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned your first love!**”

(4) To the church at **Laodicea**, the Crucified, Risen, Ascended and Exalted Christ has this to say: “**I know that your works; you are neither cold nor hot! Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth**” (Revelation 3:15-16)!

2. Secondly, there is the riptide of death that is always seeking to pull us away from our God! How very tragic was the news again this past week, both locally and nationally too!

Here in the city of Forest Acres, we learned this past **Wednesday** that a young **32 year old police officer was killed during a struggle with a suspect at the Richland Mall.**

According to Forest Acres Police Chief Gene Sealy, a 32-year-old Greg Alia, a seven-year veteran on the force was killed when he responded to a call

just before 8 AM of a suspicious person in the parking lot of the mall there. When the officers arrived, they discovered that a 34-year-old man named Jarvis Hall of Eastover was running away from them through various parts of the mall.

Officer Alia caught up with Hall near the Barnes and Noble bookstore, and the two began to struggle. That's when the suspect then reportedly pulled out a gun and shot the officer in cold blood. The officer later died at a local hospital, leaving behind a wife and a six-month old son.

When a loved one is snatched away from us so insensibly like that through death, the pain that comes to the hearts and minds of the survivors, of the one who is now lost to them, is almost unbearable. How can a merciful God allow such a treacherous thing to happen?

But friends let's never forget that our God is not, nor ever has been the author of death!

God says through the Prophet Ezekiel in chapter 18:30: "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

And then there was also another one of those senseless school shootings that took place the next day, on Thursday at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon. The gunman asked his victims: "Are you a Christian, and if you are a Christian stand up!" And then he said, "Good, because you're a Christian you are going to see God in just about one second!" And then he shot in the head and killed them. The students who did not identify themselves as Christians, he shot them in the legs. -- How brave and courageous those young people were who openly identified themselves as Christians, and who died each one a martyr's death because they did so!

Now once again, there are hundreds of people whose **lives will all be forever altered and changed; not just for a day or two days, or for a few weeks, or a couple of months, but for all of the rest their lives,** because of these evil things that have been perpetrated senselessly upon their loved ones, now taken away from them through death! -- **So how is it possible even in the face of such wretched realities to maintain at least some degree of sanity, so that we might continue even then to face the future with hope, believing as Paul tells us in Romans 8 that we are still more than conquerors through Christ who loved us?**

In today's Gospel, Jesus addresses a question about marriage and divorce.

Reflecting upon God's original creation of marriage, our Lord speaks of the mystery that the **"two become one flesh."** Similarly when St. Paul wrote about husbands and wives in his letter to the Ephesians, he suddenly surprises us when he says: **"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and his Church"** (Ephesians 5:32)!

So, our epistle lesson today has this same mystery in mind too! Here the writer is also reminding us that our **salvation came about only because has GOD JOINED HIMSELF TOGETHER WITH OUR HUMAN FLESH AND BLOOD IN THE INCARNATION OF HIS SON, OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST!** In Jesus, God has become "one flesh" with us! By Baptism into Christ, we all are born anew as children of God; we are his children! And our text begins by cautioning us against some type of "spiritual divorce" or "falling away from the family of God" through our neglect of God's Word and worship. **Then our attention is fixed on the God-man Jesus. Here the writer contends that Jesus identified himself so intimately with us as to share our human nature, so that we might share in his sinless, eternal life!**

Wedding services are usually filled with beauty, joy, and good wishes. But right after the vows of faithfulness are joyfully, nervously, and sometimes tearfully exchanged, the couple is recognized and announced as husband and wife! But just then, these words of Jesus that were not found in the Old Testament text of Genesis are added and spoken of as a solemn warning given to them by our Lord. "What therefore God has joined together let not man separate!" (Matt. 19:6, Mark 10:7). Amen!

While the letter to the Hebrews begins with a beautiful description of the **supremacy of God's Son, in this second chapter it now shifts to a warning. Here the writer exhorts us to pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it! (v. 1)**

This warning isn't simply about not letting your mind wander when you are listening to a sermon, which happens to most everyone, I would imagine from time to time! No, the kind of "drifting away" the writer is talking to us about here—is to physically separate OURSELVES FROM THE PLACE WHERE THE WORD IS BEING PROCLAIMED AND GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE HEARD BY US. AS THE BODY NEEDS PHYSICAL NOURISHMENT AND FOOD TO REMAIN HEALTHY, ALIVE AND GROW, SO THE HEART REDEEMED BY FAITH NEEDS TO CONSTANTLY HEAR THE GOSPEL TO KEEP OUR FAITH ALIVE AND STRONG. AND ISN'T THIS ALSO WHY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST INSTITUED THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION ON THE NIGHT BEFORE HE DIED?

Outright rejecting God's Word is one thing. But simple neglect of hearing God's Word can result in the same thing, namely, falling away from faith. Our text uses a word that describes a boat that becomes untied from the dock and, because of contrary winds, simply drifts away.

Spiritually, the contrary winds are false doctrines or teachings that contradict the pure Gospel.

The apostle Paul even uses this same kind of boating language when he warns against being **"tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine"** (Ephesians 4:14). **"Therefore,"** our text warns, **"we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it"** (Vv. 1-2)!

3. Thirdly, brothers and sisters, the Bible also constantly cautions us that the riptide of the devil can also do much to cause us to drift away from our God and his Word.

St. Peter was writing out of his own personal experience when he wrote one day: **"Be careful your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brothers and sisters through the world!"** (I Peter 5:8-9)

And one of the ways, James makes plain to us, that the devil seeks to lure us away from God and his Word is by tantalizing us to embrace the ways of the world, which according to the Prophet Isaiah have always been opposed and contrary to the ways and the will of God (Isaiah 55:6-9).

We heard St James say something very similar to us in our epistle lesson two weeks ago when he writes in the fourth chapter of his epistle: **"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God! Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God!"** Then James continues by saying: **"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you!"** (James 4:4-8)

One of my favorite hymns is that one entitled: **"Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,"** that was written by a man named **Robert Robinson in 1757, a native of England.**

Have you ever heard the story behind that hymn? Robert Robinson was born in England in 1842 and was just a small boy when his father died. In 18th century England there was little in the way of a social welfare system and this

meant that he had to go to work while he was still very young. **Without a father to guide and steady him, Robert fell in with bad companions. One day his gang of rowdies harassed a drunken gypsy. In exchange for their giving her some free liquor they demanded that she tell them their fortunes for free.** Pointing her finger at Robert, she told him he **would live to see his children and grandchildren.** This struck a tender spot in his heart. **“If I am going to live to see my children and grandchildren,”** he thought, **“I’ll have to change my way of living! I can’t keep living like I am living now!”**

So Robert Robinson decided to go hear the great **Methodist preacher George Whitefield, but he was only half-serious about going there with pure motives.** Therefore, he suggested that his friends go with him and heckle the gathering. But having heard the sermon, the **Holy Spirit began to work on Robert Robinson’s heart,** and he began to live in dread, because he was **now fully aware of his sinful state before God, a period of intense personal struggle that plagued him for almost three years.** But finally at the age of 20, Robert Robinson confessed his sins, was baptized, and received Jesus Christ as the Lord of his life. Making about as complete of a turnaround spiritually in his life as had the Apostle Paul, **a few years later he heard God calling him to become a pastor in the Methodist Church. Two years later in 1757 he wrote this beautiful hymn.**

“Come thou fount of many blessings, tune my heart to sing thy grace. Streams of mercy never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.

“While the hope of endless glory fills my heart with joy and love, Teach me ever to adore thee; may I still thy goodness prove!”

In the last stanza Robert Robinson had written: **“Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. Take my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above!”**

And prone to wander, Robert Robinson was, even by his own admission. For there was some years later once again when he went through a great time of doubt and personal struggle concerning his faith and everything he had come to firmly believe. One day during that period of **personal turmoil and pain he was riding on a stagecoach when a lady asked him what he thought of the hymn that she was humming.** He responded, “Madam, I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I could only have once again have the kind of personal faith back, and deep feelings of conviction, I had when I wrote that hymn!

It is said that this woman responded to him by saying: **“Sir, the streams of mercy you wrote about in the first verse of this wonderful hymn are still flowing and still flowing for you too, aren’t they!?”** And in that moment his

faith was completely replenished and he remained a strong and committed Christian; a powerful preacher of the Gospel until his dying day!

Like Robert Robinson we too can say: **“Oh to grace how great a debtor daily I’m constrained to be! Let that grace now like a fetter bind my wandering heart to thee! Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it! Prone to leave the God I love! Here’s my heart Lord, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above!”**
Amen