

Sermon, May 29, 2022  
Hebrews 6:13-20

### “The Steadfast Anchor of the Soul”

The New Testament is made up of the gospels, the Book of Acts, and Revelation. The rest are letters written to various 1st century congregations, with one exception. Hebrews is not a letter, but appears to be a sermon, although, obviously, a very long sermon. It is also not known when it was written, or who it was written by. There are some biblical scholars who think that it may be the only Writing in the New Testament that was written by a woman - specifically, by a woman named Priscilla who was an important leader in the early church.

It addresses a congregation that appears to have been losing its faith. It had been victims of persecution, and some members appear to be dealing with disappointment that God's promised kingdom had not yet come and were leaving the church. The author of the sermon is clearly trying to reignite their faith, encouraging them to cling to hope. In our reading the example of Abraham is raised, who is often referred to as the father of faith, and whose enduring patience led to the fulfilled promise. It then goes on to speak of a “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul”, which is revealed in the person of Jesus.

(If I may digress for a moment, I would point out that the anchor was one of the earliest symbols of the church, in fact, long before the cross became the dominant symbol. Many images of anchors can be found in the catacombs in Rome, especially in a catacomb named for Priscilla. It is generally accepted that the idea came from this verse in Hebrews, which suggests that just as an anchor can stabilize a ship in stormy waters, a faith in Christ can offer us stability and hope amidst the storms of life. That is why the images in the catacombs are called the Anchor of Hope.)

This is obviously a timely message for today's church, both in terms of the millions who have left the church in recent decades, and that the church today finds itself in a very stormy time in the world and in our country. Economic instability, the ongoing Covid pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and, most certainly, the recent mass shootings, shake our confidence, and leave us needing something that can give us hope as we look to our future. The author of Hebrews exhorts us to look to Jesus as our anchor!

Looking at the killings in Buffalo and Uvalde, as always, raises up cries for more gun control, and for others, the need for more attention to mental health issues - and I certainly agree that we need more common-sense gun control and attention to mental health problems, but I think that it goes much deeper than that. I believe that there is a pervasive moral and spiritual illness in this country - an illness that has to do with a lack of moral and spiritual anchors, a lack that leads to the anger and hatefulness that leads to the violent tragedies that plague this country. For those of us who are Christians that means holding firmly to the anchor of our hope, Jesus Christ! But what does that mean? Does it mean that we must exercise the enduring patience of Abraham? Yes, it does, but that does not mean that we have to just sit back and wait for God to suddenly sweep in and make everything okay. Faith and hope are not an invitation for the church to remain sedentary, but, rather, an initiative to go out and do what is necessary to create a better world.

A favorite saying of mine is - "Ships in a harbor are safe, but that is not what ships are for!" Church buildings can be seen as safe harbors, a place where we can come together in fellowship, to offer worship to our God, to pray for guidance and faith, to experience the sense of being anchored to that which gives us stability. But Jesus did not call us to *REMAIN* at anchor, but, instead, gave us the Great Commission to go out into the world and do what he commanded us to do. And he was certainly the prime example of that. He spent his time in synagogue, as well as being engaged deep in prayer, but then he went out into a troubled and stormy world, where he comforted those who were hurting, where he spoke truth to power, where he sought and strived for change in the society in which he lived.

Jesus has often been seen as a sweet and gentle soul sent here to help us be good little boys and girls and get us to heaven; but the gospels paint a different picture. He most certainly was a man driven by love, but it was a radical love - a love that demanded justice, especially for those marginalized and discriminated against - a love that called out some as a brood of vipers - a love that led him to overturn the tables of the money changers - a love that sought a better world. This is the love he wants us to embody, a love that calls us to up anchor and have the faith necessary to turn our hopes for a better world into reality. Amen.

**Let us pray:** O God, gracious and loving, we come before you today, crying out in the midst of a stormy world, yearning for a brighter day. How much longer, Lord, must we endure the ceaseless violence, and the hatred that feeds it, and how much longer must the innocent suffer at the hands of such hate? What must we do to make your brand of love change the world we live in? We lift up those who died for no other reason than the color of their skin, and for innocent children who died senselessly. Embrace them all in your loving Spirit, bring healing to the wounded, and comfort those who grieve. Let such grief be a catalyst for action. Forgive us when we remain silent in the face of evil and show us how to embody the radical love we see in your Son, Jesus. We look to him as our steadfast anchor but know that we must not remain in harbor too long - that we must set sail under that wind called the Holy Spirit to bear witness to your transformational love. Lead us, guide us, equip us with the faith and courage needed to do your will in the world.

This weekend we also honor those who driven by conscience gave the "last full measure of devotion" for the sake of country and freedom, and, at the same time, pray for peace, that no more shall shed their blood on the field of battle. Show us how we may, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, "beat (our) swords into plowshares, and (our) Spears into pruning hooks", that we may create a world where "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and neither shall (we) learn war anymore."

We also invoke your healing love for those who are sick physically, mentally, and spiritually, for those who are hungry and in need of shelter, as well as asking your loving presence with those who are dying. Amen.