The Cause and the Effect
Hebrews 10:19-25

Good morning Colonial! I’m Pastor Tami, one of the associate pastors at our OP campus. Today is the Sunday between Christmas and the New Year, and this Sunday always finds us in a bit of a gap. We have finished Advent but are not quite ready to jump back into the gospel of John yet. So today is a stand-alone message intended to dig into the word of God and give you some encouragement and even maybe provide some direction for the new year.

In May of 2002, my husband, Erik and I were living in Armour Hills, a sweet little 80 year old neighborhood, now a 100 year old neighborhood located between Brookside and Waldo in KC MO. This was a little bit of a “transitional” neighborhood at the time, which means while our little neighborhood was perfectly safe, it was surrounded by a few areas that were maybe not “perfectly” safe. So, Erik and I volunteered to be our block’s “Block Watch Captains”, which really just meant we had to introduce ourselves to everyone on our block, maybe exchange numbers, check in on them from time to time, and build relationships. Totally up my alley!

So, on a warm day in May Erik and I rang the doorbell of a couple who lived three doors down from us, Marc and Lisa Sheppard. We both had really big dogs that loved to play with each other, so we would say “hi” and stop and chat when we would run into each on walks. We were just starting to form a friendship. So, we knocked on their door to formally introduce ourselves as the block watch captains and all that sort of stuff. And it turned out they were just getting ready reach out to us because they were staring a bible study at their house. A study for young couples
without kids. They had 3 other couples from their little church plant already committed and they wanted to know if we would be interested.

What they didn’t know was that Erik and I had been looking for a church for a couple of years at that point but couldn’t find anything that was a good fit. I grew up in a small Mennonite town, and couldn’t wrap my head around going to a big church where you didn’t know everyone. And while Erik grew up in a big church, he wasn’t exactly sure what he was looking for, so we just hadn’t found one. But we both knew we needed something, so this was an easy yes! What Marc and Lisa ALSO didn’t know was that we were already 3 months pregnant with Isabella, so we would only meet the criteria of married with no kids for about 6 more months. But we decided that we just wouldn’t tell them that part and joined the group anyway. Maybe they wouldn’t notice my growing belly or the addition of an infant?

This group turned out to be one of the most significant aspects of both mine and Erik’s walk with Jesus. I don’t think I can put into words the impact this group had on us. We met once a week for the next 10 years! Couples came and couples went, but there was a core group of us that lived life together. By the time this group stopped meeting we had dozens of babies between us all, we built each other’s decks, remodeled kitchens, bought and sold houses, changed careers and moved abroad for missions work, all within in the amazing Christian bubble of love and support. It was in this group Erik and I learned how to live our daily lives as followers of Christ, we were prayed over, encouraged, supported, and loved in ways I can’t put into words. Even though most of us live in different states now, we still consider these people some of our dearest friends. This group of believers was a real life - modern day example of Hebrews 10:19-25.

Follow along as I read this passage

"19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places 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 draw near 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 the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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 drawing near.” (Slide 1)

Now I am not a lover of grammar - I know I should be, as a Bible teacher and former Speech language pathologist. I should love all things grammar and be able to diagram grammatical structures in my sleep. But alas, I can not. I’ve just never enjoyed that kind of thing. And I know so many of you do love that. I am so sorry I don’t share that joy. However, I am enough of a speech language pathologist and a student of language to understand the importance of recognizing grammatical structures in order to decode a message. When I look at these verses, I see a cause and effect structure. Because of A - the indicative or the cause, we need to do B, C, and D, those are the imperatives or the effect. So today, I have three subheadings for you…

1. The Cause
2. The Effect
3. The Challenge (slide 2)

Before we jump into the cause, we need to do a little background work. In order to properly apply any scripture to our lives today, we need to understand what it meant to it’s original audience. So, we need to spend
some time today putting these verses into their proper context, then we can accurately draw out of them what it is the author wants us to know.

We don’t know who wrote this particular book of Bible, but we do know who it was written to. The audience was primarily Hebrew Christians, former Jews who had converted to Christianity, thus the title, “Hebrews.” These were Jewish believers who had placed their faith in Jesus Christ and they were now struggling with what to do with the rituals and traditions of the Jewish faith that had been ingrained in them their whole lives. Because of their new faith, and their struggles with Jewish traditions, they were likely experiencing persecution from other Jews, which, in turn, tempted them to return to Judaism. The author’s intent then was to encourage these new, somewhat immature, believers; to give them confidence in Jesus Christ, their Messiah and High Priest; and to convince them not turn back to Judaism. The message throughout Hebrews is that Jesus is better than the religion they grew up with he is better than angels, he is better than Moses, and he is the perfect High Priest. He is supreme and completely sufficient for salvation. Christianity offers a better hope, a better covenant, a better sanctuary, and more sufficient sacrifice for sin than the religion of their past. And for the first nine and half chapters of Hebrews this is what the author argues.

And after laying all that out, after laying out how Christ is greater than angels, Moses, and the OT priesthood. After explaining that Jesus IS the one and only great High Priest of the new and superior covenant; after spelling out how Christ is the perfect sacrifice, the author gives his audience some very clear instruction on how this new “Christian Church” should act, and why it should act like that. That is what we find in Hebrews 10:19-25. So, let’s start with the why or the cause.

1. The CAUSE (slide 3)
CAUSE refers to a person, event, condition or reason that is responsible for an action or result. (slide 4) In this case the cause or the reason for the church is given in verses 19 and 21. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus… 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God…” This is the person, the event and condition that is responsible for the action to come. The author is imploring his audience that because Jesus is THE great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice, as he described in detail in the preceding chapters, they, the children of God - his holy nation are now able enter the Most Holy place.

Again, context is important here. This makes sense to us, non-Jewish believers, 2000 years later. We know it is through Jesus that we have full and complete access to God. We know we can enter into his presence and that we ourselves, our very bodies are the new temple, the dwelling place of God’s Holy Spirit. But to the Jewish Christians this message was originally written for, this was extraordinary news. They had spent their entire lives understanding they were not allowed into the dwelling place of God, the holy of holies. Prior to the life of Jesus, the presence of God on earth dwelt in the temple in Jerusalem. And not all over the temple but in one specific place - the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies. Only one person was ever allowed into the Holy of Holies, into the presence of God, and only one time a year. A veil that was 60 feet high, 30 feet wide and 4 inches thick, separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple and on the day of Atonement the High Priest, and ONLY the High Priest would pass through the veil into the holy of holies and sprinkle the blood of a perfect lamb on the alter as a sacrifice for the sins of Israel. This had to be done every year to atone for their sins.

But, Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross changed all that. The moment of Jesus death, the curtain separating God from the sins of the world, was literally torn in two, from the top to the bottom. As the veil was torn, the Holy of Holies was exposed. God’s presence was now accessible to all.
Jesus THE greatest High Priest, using His own sacrificial blood, cleansed the sins of Israel once and for all. And this cleansing would never have to be renewed again.

With full access to God due to faith in Jesus Christ and HIS sacrifice, the rigors and works of the Jewish law were no longer necessary! Honestly, those works had proven to be completely ineffective at drawing the people of Israel into a love relationship with God anyway, ultimately the law drove the Jewish people further away from God not closer to Him. The author of Hebrews exhorts his audience that they can now CONFIDENTLY enter in the Holy Places by the blood of Jesus. They can know THAT is where they belong - in the presence of God - not because of their works, but by the blood of Jesus shed for their sin.

We, as children of God today have this same confidence. As scholar Peter O’Brien writes, “It is because Jesus is our high priest that we can hold firmly to our confession and approach the throne of grace with confidence.” *(The Letter to the Hebrews by Peter T. O’Brien)* (slide 5)

We can boldly approach God, like a loving Father, confident that we, as his own children will be loved, listened to, cared for. And this changes who we are and what we do. Jesus’ love, his life, death, and resurrection - the cause - is responsible for the effect.

**II. The EFFECT** (slide 6)

An EFFECT refers to a result brought about by a cause or agent. *(Slide 7)*

Be- CAUSE of who Jesus is, be-CAUSE of what he has done. There are three results the author wants the Jewish Christians to experience. He wants them to

1. **Draw near with a true heart and FULL assurance of faith**
2. **Hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering**
3. **Consider how to stir one another to love and good works.** (Slide 8)

One of the primary effects of one’s confidence in Jesus death and resurrection as sufficient to allow them to stand before God in the holy places, one effect of that, is that they can then draw near to Him with a true heart in full assurance of their faith that they are right before God. The problem with the rigors of the law, was that it was really really hard to get it right, and there was very little assurance that one’s faith was true and secure. It was all works and very little relationship. The author wants these new Christians to be sure in their relationship with God. They can be confident and draw near to God, not worried about their sin, or getting it right, because Jesus has taken that sin - they are washed clean.

Another effect is the Hebrew Christians were also to hold fast to the confession of their hope without wavering because they knew God was faithful. He will always do what he has promised to do. These new Christians were getting pressure from the Jews who had not put their faith in Jesus Christ to come back to Judaism, or at the very least work in the traditions of Judaism, the works of Judaism into the new faith. And the author wanted the Christians to hold fast to the confession of Jesus. HE was sufficient, HE was their hope, HE was how God was proving his faithfulness.

And the final effect is that they were to look beyond themselves to others; stirring them on to love and good works. They were to consider others. They were to think about not just their own relationship with Jesus, but also their friends and families relationships with Jesus. They were to continually meet and interact and share life with other believers and encourage one another in their Christian walk.

The word for love used in verse 24 is agape - this is the highest most sacrificial love. This is true, Christ-like love. Because of Jesus love, they were to stir others up to Christ-like love! How does one go about stirring
up those around you to love like Christ loves? You do it by example. It
takes agape love to stir others up to agape love. It takes loving like Christ
to stir others up to love like Christ.

My dear friends Mark and Lisa who started our beloved Bible study back in
Armour hills, had, still have agape love. They are confident in their
relationship with Jesus, they KNOW that they are welcome in the very
presence of God, and they have FULL assurance that they are saved. They
hold fast to the confession of Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior over
every aspect of their lives. They spend their days stirring up others to
Christ like agape love and good works.

They stirred up and encouraged Erik and I and our entire Bible study! They
never neglected to meet with us, not just on Sunday mornings at church,
but every single Thursday evening for Bible study, and most weekends just
to hang out. They encouraged Erik and I in our walk with Jesus. And
because they did all this, Erik and I became confident in OUR relationship
with Jesus. We KNOW we are welcome in the very presence of God, and
we have FULL assurance that we are saved. We hold fast to the
confession of Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior over every aspect of our
lives - so much so, that I went into professional ministry. And now I spend
my days stirring up others to Christ- like love and good works, not
neglecting to meet, but encouraging them.

And that is how the author of Hebrews argues the Christian church is
supposed to work over and over again as the Day draws near. Because of
Jesus Christ's love, we are to stir up others to Christ-like love through our
own Christ like love. (Slide 9)

And that is the challenge.

3. The CHALLENGE (slide 10)
These directions that the author gave to the Hebrew Christians 2000 years ago are the same directions we are given today. Because of Chris’s love, because he died on the cross for us, because his death is absolutely sufficient to cover all our sins, we can enter the most holy place, the very presence of God, through our faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to confidently draw near to him, assured that our faith is true. We are to hold fast to our confession of faith without wavering, firm on Christ the solid Rock we stand. And we are to stir up others to Christ like love, by our own Christ like love.

Do you do that? Do you intentionally, consciously, consider how to help others in their walk with Christ? I know, this is hard, nothing about being a Christian is easy. But this is what we are called to do!

One of the easiest ways to do this, is to continually meet together. The biggest detriment to any person’s spiritual walk, is isolation. In Greek this idea of “not neglecting to meet together” is bigger than just not doing something. It isn’t just missing church or not meeting, it is intentionally neglecting to meet - it is forsaking the community, abandoning the body of Christ. And I KNOW we are in the midst of a pandemic, I get that!! I truly do, but it has never been more important to be engaged in the body of Christ, in community, than it is right now!! In whatever way you can do that.

Here is the thing, there is a difference between a congregation and an aggregation. An aggregation is gathering together in a mutually exclusive way, in which one is not dependent on another, like a bunch of marbles in a bag. You can pull one out and the rest of the marbles are fine. An aggregation would be going to hear a lecture at a university. You are not invested in the other people in the room. You are there for the information and that’s about it. But a congregation, is organically related to one another, like a bunch of grapes. If something happens to one, all are impacted in some way. We are a congregation, not an aggregation. All aspects of our lives should touch each other in some way or another.
It is possible to simply attend church every week and not experience community. But that isn’t what the author of Hebrews is directing us to. There is a depth here, a relationship, a much deeper mutual ministry, where we let each other into our lives. Where we encourage one other, love one another, challenge one another, and bear with one another. C.S. Lewis says it perfectly in Mere Christianity…

"Christ works on us in all sorts of ways, but above all else he works on us through others. We are carriers of Christ to each other. It’s easy to think that the church’s many purposes, education, missions, building, holding service, is most important, but the purpose of all purposes is the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose.” (Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis) (slide 11)

So what does that look like to meet with each other to “one another” each other in the midst of a pandemic? When many people are not comfortable leaving their home, or even if you do leave your home, you are limited in the number of people can gather with? Maybe it means gathering with a smaller group of people. Maybe it means joining an online Bible study. Maybe it means just picking up the phone and calling a few people you know from church on a regular basis. Now is the time to stir up one another to love and good works. NOW is the time to meet together in whatever manner we can.

New groups will be launching in just a couple of weeks. You can go online now to colonialkc.org/groups (slide 12) and look through all of our group offerings. Find a group that looks interesting to you and sign up. If you need help finding a group please reach out. We have an entire team that can help you find a group. Email me at tlundgren@colonialkc.org (slide 13) and we will help you find a group! If you are part of a life group that
used to meet but took a break because of the pandemic, would you consider starting to meet again. I know you are “zoomed out”. I don’t know when that became a verb, but it is. But here’s the thing. You can’t do this alone. It is better to connect online than to not connect at all - it is. People fall in love online all the time! You can have meaningful community online. And if you are comfortable in person, we have groups that are meeting live, come, join us! Please! It is only in community that we are able to be the church God has called us to be. Let’s pray.