

Title: “Draw Near with a True Heart”

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Hebrews 10:19-24

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Service Readings: Dan. 12:1–3; Heb. 10:11–25; Mark 13:1–13

With confidence, let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father...

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The date was June 30, 1859. The location was the Niagara Gorge. The stage was set, or to be more accurate, an 1,100 foot rope had been strung between the two sides of the valley, about 165 feet above the raging river. Large crowds had gathered on both sides and their expectations were high. Charles Blondin would attempt to cross from one side to the other by walking on that slender rope. With firm confidence he placed first his left foot and then his right. And without even a moment of hesitation, he began to traverse the gorge as if walking on a fortified bridge. Twenty three minutes later he had walked across and then back again. Over the next several weeks and months he would traverse it again and again: sometimes blindfolded, sometimes on stilts, and sometimes carrying his manager. He performed flips; he performed somersaults. He crossed while shackled. He even crossed one time with an iron stove, balancing it long enough to cook an omelet!

All on a three inch rope!

It is said that during one trip, after crossing with a wheelbarrow while blindfolded, he called out to the crowd, “Do you believe I can carry a person across in this wheelbarrow?” They answered enthusiastically in the affirmative. He then asked for a volunteer; he received none. Why not? They had seen him perform successfully many times. He was successful for each and every one of them. He would surely be successful again. So what stopped them from volunteering? I think that the answer to that is that *his* confidence was not *their* confidence. He could describe his confidence to them, even show it off, but until they made it their own, until it moved from their head to their heart, this confidence remained his, and his alone.

Now this may not be a perfect analogy but it does describe two different types of people – each with different levels of confidence. What separated them from each other? Why was Charles confident but the crowd not? We can probably list many reasons but I think they all condense down to just two things: practice and perseverance. Because of these two things, Charles had the confidence to step out onto the rope, knowing that he would be kept safe. Now, we’ll dig into the details of that in just a moment, but I’d like to connect this discussion with a portion of the Epistle that we heard this morning:

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. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

The world was raging for these early Christians, like the river beneath that tightrope. All around they saw the persecution of other believers: from the secular forces and also from the religious ones. They experienced hate and discrimination. How, then could the author instruct them to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering? How could he expect them to even accomplish that?

He describes it in the verses above where he reminds them that Jesus opened the curtain – the barrier that once stood between us and God. By the sacrifice of his body and the shedding of his blood what we were once restrained from, we are now welcome to enter. And not just enter, but enter boldly and with confidence. Confidence that through Jesus, the father views us as sinless, spotless. We have been washed by Christ's blood and can now stand in the throne room of God.

But all this is just a description of the reality that we have in the work of Jesus. It's a great description, a great reality, don't get me wrong. But if that's all it is, we are like the participants that understand the confidence of Charles, but don't fully share in it, and thus can't draw on it for strength in times of trouble and turmoil. So how do we make this reality our own? Practice. And perseverance. We can turn one last time to Charles to understand, from a worldly perspective, how confidence is formed and strengthened. Before taking that first step on that wire, he had spent decades practicing. No one can count the number of hours he spent learning how to balance on the rope – a rope that started out only inches off the ground. There was no fear of injury and so he could perseverance on perfecting one skill at a time – first balancing, then walking, then jumping, and so on. His confidence was new but it was also weak. And he failed, a lot. But over time his confidence grew stronger. He grew more confident in the abilities of not just himself, but also in the abilities and security of all that he relied on. The anchors, attached securely to the ground never once failed him. He could stand on the wire for hours, with all kinds of weights, perform all kinds of dangerous activities, with a full confidence that the anchors would hold the rope. And the rope, too, the rope that his life also depended on, never failed him. During these countless hours of practice, when a failure of any of these things would have caused nothing but inconvenience, they held up. And so, those many years later when he had to trust that same equipment, but this time with his very life, he did so with full confidence.

In the same way as practice, his perseverance allowed him to weather any challenge, any burst of wind or other obstacle that threatened his life. Why? Because of his confidence in what kept him alive. He knew that he could rely on the security of the rope, the anchors, and other equipment. He could continue to move forward, constantly relying on that which had never failed him in the past, knowing that it would not fail him now.

Let's move past him and talk about ourselves. We have a God who has burdened himself with our sins. One who has endured the judgement. One who has experienced physical pain, who suffered and died. We have a God who has risen from the grave in victory. We have a God who now offers us eternal life in his presence. This reality is our anchor and our rope. God has called us, placed us on one side, set us on that rope, and he asks us to walk. He asks us with faith to have the same confidence in him that Charles had in his anchors and rope. But how? How do we *do* that? How do we find that same confidence? The same was as Charles: practice and persistence.

We have a God who has done so much for us, but a God who hasn't stopped giving. He comes to us, makes himself known to us in so many ways. Through the hearing of his Word, through the participation

at his table, he serves us, forgives us, but just as important, strengthens our faith so that we can have the confidence to walk wherever he leads, and over whatever rages around us. And so that we can do so with confidence that he, like Charles, will never be let down.

So, come. Draw near with a true heart. Meet him in his Word. Meet him at his table. Do this constantly, as often as you can. And in this way you will persevere through any trial that comes your way.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our sure anchor and unwavering support, we thank you that through the precious blood of your son, Jesus Christ, you have opened the way into your holy presence. Just as you sustained our Lord through his suffering and death, and raised him victorious over the grave, so too strengthen our confidence in your promises. Through your Word and Sacraments, grant us steadfast faith that we may walk boldly through the storms of this life, knowing that you who have called us will never fail us. When doubts assail us and the waters rage below, fix our eyes upon Christ, our Great High Priest, who has gone before us and made the way secure. Guide us in faithful practice of your Word, that our trust in your promises may grow ever deeper, until that day when we shall stand before your throne, not on our own merits, but solely through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.