



September 16-18, 2023 -- Welcome Home Weekend

Preacher: Pastor Scott Oelhafen

Sermon Theme: Welcome Home! (Hebrews 2: 9-18)

1. Home is where our brother Jesus promises to be
2. Home is where our fellow brothers and sisters are

Hebrews 2: 9-18 ⁹ 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." ¹⁴ And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me." ¹⁵ 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— ¹⁶ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. ¹⁷ For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. ¹⁸ For this reason he had to be made like them, ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

In the saving name of the Triune God who loves us and has freed us by His blood, dear brothers and sisters in God's family,

Welcome Home! Does this place called St. Paul's Lutheran Church feel like home to you? I can already see it on some of your faces. Some of you can't wait to say: "Yes! Absolutely. This is the place where I know people care about me here and I care about them. They tell me God's truth here" And if that's the way you feel, praise God. Praise God because when we gather for worship, God wants us to know that we are home, safe and secure with our spiritual family who give us God's truth. But, I also know there may be some here who'd say the complete opposite: "Home? This place? It's never felt that way to me." Yes, there are some hurting Christians who feel alienated from their Christian family. And to you, especially to you, I say: "I'm sorry – that's not our intent among this church family called St. Paul's Lutheran. God is here. His mercy still endures forever. We're also here for you and care about you. If you're hurting, please privately speak with me or another St. Paul's minister this week because we want to help. But, for now, know this. You are in the right place, despite the devil's lying attempts to convince you otherwise." I invite you to leave your past hurts at the cross and let's turn to the powerful Word of God which heals in Hebrews, Chapter two. Every time we step into this church sanctuary, I pray you remember God's greeting: **Welcome Home.** As we study the words of Hebrews chapter two, first of all, we'll discover that Home is where our brother Jesus promises to be. And Home is where our fellow brothers and sisters are.

In Hebrews, chapter 2, we're told something remarkable, something big, something that should blow us away every time we hear it: the eternal God of the universe is our brother Jesus. Scripture promises us that. Let's review Jesus' identity. The writer to the Hebrews spends the better part of chapter 1 proving Jesus is God. Listen to this: VERSE TWO: **He (that is Jesus) is the heir of all things** – God owns all things and Jesus owns all things; God is Jesus and Jesus is God. VERSE THREE: **He's the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being** – if you want to know what the Father is like, just look at the Son. VERSE SIX: **Let all God's angels worship Him** – we only worship God and that's why we worship Jesus. These verses and more prove that Jesus is truly God. And to think that this Jesus, counts Himself as our brother, literally a personal member of his family, well, that's (sound-effects) mind-blowing

Look at it this way, One of my favorite quirky Christmas movies is **Christmas Vacation** that stars Chevy Chase as Clark Griswald. Ever see it before? In **Christmas Vacation** we are introduced to his down and out cousin Eddie who lives full-time in a Winnebago along with his raggedy kids. That sure was a motley crew who came for a holiday visit. They say you can pick your friends, but you can't pick your family. Yet, consider this! With all of our personal foibles and flaws, our perfect brother Jesus still picked us in Baptism to be included in His family ... that's amazing!

And in our opening verses of chapter two, we're reminded what Jesus did for us. We hear how Jesus became our human brother and was made **"lower than the angels for a little while."** You know what that's called, what Jesus did? Dumpster-diving. Have you ever been dumpster diving? Back in high school, I had one of those old-fashioned metal retainers that I had to take out every time I ate. I remember my dad telling me how valuable the retainer was and reminded me not to lose it. Well one Friday, after a football game, I was eating at McDonalds with my friends. I remember cleaning my food tray into one of those big industrial-sized wastebaskets and then suddenly realizing in terror my retainer was on the tray. Remember my father's words, I had to go dumpster diving to get it back. I sorted through every half-eaten Big Mac and every sticky, slimy wrapper to retrieve it. I know gross. But, in a much deeper spiritual sense, Jesus went dumpster diving to save you and me. And here's what I mean. Jesus, God's Son left His perfect home in heaven and chose to be born into this dumpster called earth to search through the gross filth of this fallen world, to rescue you and me.

And He did this for a purpose, to **bring many sons and daughters to glory**. Just think what that verse means. Our brother Jesus took our sin upon Himself and did what no one else could do. By His death on the cross, He gave us the clean forgiveness that we crave so we may bask in Jesus' glory. When I think of basking in Jesus' glory, I think of a behind-the-scenes' movie interview I once heard. Hollywood actor Kevin Bacon was showing his grade school son his famous *Footloose* movie for the first time. The boy asked his dad about it. He said: "Hey dad, you know in the movie when you were swinging from the rafters of that building, how'd you do that?" Kevin admitted to his son: "Well, I didn't do that part – that was a stunt man." "What's a stunt man?" the boy asked. Kevin explained: "A stunt man is someone who dresses like me and does the things I can't do." "Oh," said the boy looking a bit confused. But, he continued: "And dad, you know that part in the movie where you spin around on that gym bar and land on your feet, how did you do that?" Kevin answered: "Well, I didn't do that either. That was a gymnastics' double." "What's a gymnastics' double?" "That's a guy who dresses in my clothes and does what I can't do." There was long silence from his son who finally asked in a concerned voice "Well, dad. What DID you do?" "I got all the glory," Kevin sheepishly replied. My friends, we get more than the glory of a movie because of faith in Christ. We get the glory of God's forgiveness right now and a certain future in heaven.

But, verse 11 is the real BOMBSHELL of this sermon. It says: ***“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.*** Some people today are ashamed of their families. Perhaps your dad embarrasses you or your mom is a mess. Maybe your brother or sister has had a brush with the law. So you're ashamed of that relationship. You're concerned about what others think of you if they knew you're related.

If there was EVER someone who had a right to be ashamed of His family, it's Jesus. For all our sinful pasts, He should've disowned us a long time ago. Were we HE, this is most certainly what we'd do. But, WE are not HE. He is the one who made us perfect and holy in God's sight. He's proud today to call us brothers and sisters, his family.

And HE, that is Jesus, is right here, right now. As sure as I'm standing in front of you, as close as the person in the pew, when we come into God's house, Jesus is here. And what is He here doing? VERSE Twelve says: ***I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters. In the assembly, I will sing your praises.*** My --isn't that interesting? Jesus joins our worship as we sing each hymn, and as we pray each prayer. He's with us to praise His Father in heaven. No wonder we love to come to this place called St. Paul's and be welcomed home to worship. But, Jesus is here more than to worship with us. He's here to GIVE, to give us His forgiveness so we don't need to fear God's anger anymore, to give us the promise of eternal life so we never need to fear death when it comes, and to give us strength so that we never need to face temptation on our own. In verse 18, it says: ***“Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*** Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted so He can help us in our every temptation. No wonder God says to us: welcome home.

But, our home, our church home is where our fellow brothers and sisters are. Think about this. If Jesus is our brother and God is our Father, then we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We may not be related by human blood but by Jesus' blood. If you were raised in a loving family, the thought of coming home brings good memories. Some of my strongest memories of coming home are coming home to Flint, Michigan. It makes me think of my mom's meatloaf and my dad taking time to play catch with me. And even though my childhood seems like a million years ago, and my dad is now in heaven and my mom moved to Hartford, Wisconsin, I still look forward to seeing her. Whether it's spending a time for a family Christmas or a just a quick hello, just hearing my mom's voice reminds me of home.

In a similar way, some Christians have had great experiences in God's house. I recently talked with Nick who said that His Connect Group makes him feel closer to his Christian family when they study God's Word together. And many of you have found this same warmth and welcome in so many ways, when a child is baptized, confirmed, or you witness a Christian funeral in this place. We do have Christ's love here. And we want every one to have that experience, even if we fall short.

That's why WELCOME HOME WEEKEND gives us all the special opportunity to repent of our sins against God and each other. We beg forgiveness from Christ and from one another for every hurtful word or self-serving action. And as God reminds us today how He has freed us from our slavery to sin so each of us now can look for ways to show His kind of love and forgiveness in this place. Let's ask each other each week: who is hurting? Who needs help? How can I serve? What can I do?

Armed with this new attitude, God helps us create the kind of home, a real Christian community we all long for. With an extra smile or a kind word to someone you may not even know we can find real encouragement as we face an increasingly hostile world. Don't let the devil tell you different.

Sons and daughters. Brothers and sisters. Family – it doesn't get any more personal than that. And that's how God personally looks at every single one of us in Hebrews, chapter 2. And that's how God tells us to look at each other. Sometimes families get along. Sometimes it's hard. But, relying on Jesus, I pray you will look at each other and your leaders, ministers, and teachers in a brand new way: forgiven as the family of God. And brothers and sisters – let me let you in on a secret: someone probably won't call you next week to remind you. You won't get a special letter. But, here's an open invitation: Keep coming to St. Paul's each week not just to see Scharf, Smith, and Oelhafen. Keep coming to see your brother Jesus, His people, maybe even your cousin Eddie. Amen.