

Hold Firmly This Faith

- ✠ **Eager to enter that rest (vv.9-11)**
- ✠ **Prepared to give an account (vv.12-13)**
- ✠ **Praying with full confidence (vv.14-16)**

In the name of Jesus, our Great High Priest and Rescuer, dear Kris and Tom and all believers:

What a day this is for you! It will be one of the great milestones in your life if you **Hold Firmly This Faith**. If not, this day and your entire life will be a colossal waste. Let me tell you why.

✠ **Eager to enter that rest (vv.9-11)**

Not many years ago Minnesotans were shocked to hear about a boy who lost both arms in a farming accident. Sparing the gory details, imagine yourself a little groggy from heat when something gets caught. Suddenly you're being dragged in by horsepower like you've never known.

At that exact moment you would be experiencing the danger of every human being since God first warned our parents about death, but they chose instead to experiment. Accident victims remember the moments leading up to the tragedy. But we don't learn from our mistakes. Did you ever do this when you were little? Come up to your mother complaining, "Mom, it hurts when I do this." "Stop doing that," she says. We keep hurting ourselves by our sins. We easily lose our grip on **This Faith**.

The Israelites in the desert with Moses had that problem. They saw the plagues in Egypt but still kept rebelling against God in the desert. You might think, "If God would work a miracle, then I'd do what He wants." But if that were true, the Lord would not have had to scatter the bones of this Israelites in the desert. And this letter to the Hebrews would not have been written, especially not the verses before our text. Jewish Christians were tempted to let go of **This Faith** to avoid the pain of persecution.

The fallen angel from hell wants to drive a huge combine across the field of humanity. But God gives us this warning and promise: *"There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience."* Our Father in heaven gives you a clear: "Don't do that sin. Come to church and hear God's Word for the sake of your soul." If you can sense the death-grip of Satan like a runaway tractor, you'll be pulling hard and shouting, "Turn it off! Turn it off!" If you see with the eyes of faith, you'll be relieved to see Jesus right there at the switch to cut the power of evil and pull you out for good. That's the kind of *rest* God wants for your soul, the sweet *Sabbath-rest* of Jesus who said, *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...rest for your souls."* (Matthew 11:28-30 NIV) **This Faith** makes you totally **Eager to enter that rest** and thoroughly...

✠ **Prepared to give an account (vv.12-13)**

Our accounting is coming on Judgment Day. And some people will be trying very hard to get ready for God on their own. But the Holy Spirit shows how our best efforts can only backfire or blow up in his face like a bomb. But denying yourself and serving the Savior in the driving force of the Holy Spirit always results in *life*. This is true on earth and in heaven where all the effects of sin will be gone for good, the true *life* God gave us in Christ will come clear and clean. God speed the Day!

"God's word is living and active," but our English can barely describe the double-edged sword of God's Word. There's deadly drive and accuracy in God's Word. Luther translated, "kräftig," which adds a *killing craftiness* to the bone-slicing skill of this powerful weapon. We're reminded of "the cherubim,

and the flaming sword which turned every direction (τκρῆτμ:η), to guard the way to the tree of life.” (NASB) Such a sword can only be comforting if the Warrior is your victorious Savior fighting for you.

In Bible times a sword was thought of almost like an animal that devoured its victims. But in the case of God’s Word, the “*sword*” literally has *two mouths*. But people tend to take these warnings like vacationers on a beach in Indonesia or Thailand when the tsunami hit. They wonder at the relevance God’s Word for “real life.” We’ve spent lots of time in Catechism Class trying to show how in everything and in every way God’s Word is the most practical blessing for your life.

People who disagree ought to think back on the days when surgeons were called “bones.” They took their tools aboard ship or onto the battlefield and used their cutting skills for amputations. Fort Crawford Medical Museum in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, show surgical saws and knives of the 1800’s were just carpentry tools. A surgical nurse said, “I hate to tell you this, but surgeon’s tools today look like that except for the stainless steel on the cordless drills and sterilization.” Yet how many Christians settle for soul-doctors using the blunt instruments they designed, germed-over with human opinion?

We’re all like sick children who don’t know what’s wrong and can’t begin to figure it out. Where we’re hurting, the best doctors and psychiatrists cannot go. But the Great Physician, is Himself the Word-Sword which the Holy Spirit uses to cut out the cancerous growths of our sin deep inside. King David prayed: “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” (Psalm 139:23f NIV)

✠ Praying with full confidence (vv.14-16)

When all your other friends seem not to care at all, when even your parents fail to understand, remember Jesus is your “*great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God....*” Because of Jesus, “*Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*”

On *Storm Stories* there was a woman who was caught in a flash flood. She seemed okay because she was able to climb out on the roof of her car. But as rescuers rushed to reach her from the air above, the waters below kept rising. Finally it was all she could do to hang on. Almost buried under water, she was too weak to hang on any longer. Finally a Coast Guardsman reached her on the cable just in time.

God knows we need to **Hold Firmly This Faith** because the devil will never give up trying to pull you away from God. Even our families sometimes are working against heaven without knowing it. The Triune God who spoke the languages of so many people through the Apostles on the first Pentecost will keep speaking just what we need at the right time to encourage us to keep **Praying with full confidence**.

A boy in our home congregation on the Oregon coast was washed overboard. No one ever knew whether he went first or the man who owned the boat. If only someone could have heard their calls for help. Don’t ever forget that God always hears your cries for help even if you only whisper in the dark. The dear Holy Spirit is lowering the life line of Word and sacrament from the helicopter piloted by our heavenly Father. Coming down to us is His Son Jesus whose strong hands have nail prints from our cross. In the raging seas we need all the skill of all Three Persons of the Triune God working in complete harmony to pull us from certain death to the warmth and relief of His home above. He wants us to see our need and come boldly in prayer guided by faithful study of His Word and frequent reception of His Holy Supper. Stay focused like drowning sailor on the Coast Guard crew. Nothing else matters. And if you’ll keep every day like today, you will always recognize the danger and see your Savior coming to the rescue. **Hold Firmly This Faith**, and our gracious God will never let you go – for Jesus’ sake. Amen.