

**Sermon Series: From Bethlehem to Calvary to Heaven—Lord of Life Lutheran, Westfield, IN—3/21/2004**

**Title:** “Time to come out of the spiritual closet”

**Text:** Hebrews 5: 11–6: 12 & Hebrews 10: 21-25

**Intro.:** *Ills.: Leaving our shells behind*

**Theme:** In our relationship with Jesus, if we are not growing we are sliding; so the goal of our faith should always seek to fan the flames of the Spirit’s prodding to move deeper and farther into our journey of faith into Jesus.

***Snapshot of the book of Hebrews***

- **Written by an unnamed author familiar to the church** – either Paul or Apollos in thought or writing style
  1. Extensive Old Testament familiarity and quotation to make the case for Christ
  2. An aggressive call to repentance and back to faith by grace
- **Written to second generation “closet Christians”** – Jewish believers under intense persecution in danger of falling back to Judaism’s safety or hiding their faith – a call to come out of the closet and trust God to deliver
- **Extensive treatment on Jesus’ “substitution and atonement” for us** – countering any works righteous tendencies

***What can lead me to become a closet Christian?***

- Hardened hearts leading to spiritual deafness (**Print Hebrews 5: 11**)
  1. Happens when we make church going a head rather than a heart thing
  2. Are there spiritual issues, dabbling with sin, unreconciled angst against family member or fellow LOL member?
  3. *“If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Mat5:23-24*
- Spiritual immaturity leading to contentment with spiritual baby food (**Print Hebrews 5: 12–6:3**)
  4. **Ills.: Spiritually Malnourished**
  5. Leaving yourself and your family unchallenged to be in SS or Midweek or doing family devotions and prayers
  6. *“Maturity is pressing toward the mark; immaturity is complacency and self-satisfaction.”*
- A “once saved, always saved” attitude leading to an eternally destructive carelessness toward faith (**Print Heb 6:4-8**)
  7. Spiritual pride can seal us off to the Holy Spirit’s work even while we are “playing church” and “looking religious”
  8. *And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” Eph 4: 30*

***Growing toward maturity in the body of Christ (Print Hebrews 6: 9-12)***

- **Print Hebrews 10: 21-22** – Live in honest and confident accountability within the family of Christ
  1. Getting honest with God so that Satan cannot plague you with guilt
    - *“This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.” 1 John 3: 19-21*
  2. Being transparent with each other in confession so that you can hear Christ’s forgiveness through each other
    - *He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” John 20: 22-23*
- **Print Hebrews 10: 23** – Restate the confidence of your salvation and retell the God-stories within the family of Christ
  3. Not so spiritually self-made to learn something from each other
  4. **Ills.: Learning to be a navigator**
  5. Why sharing personal testimonies, joining in small group Bible study allow that to happen
- **Print Hebrews 10: 24** – Stir (irritate in the good sense) each other to get outside ourselves
  6. **Ills.: Avoiding Dead Sea Christianity** (what Interfaith Hospitality Network service is about)

7. Make it ongoing "As you have helped his people and continue to help them." vs. 10
- **Print Hebrews 10: 25** – Gather, regularly, in worship to sing and confess the faith, together
8. Weekly worship is not an option but a necessity (*notice did not say requirement*)
9. "make your hope sure" vs. 11
10. "Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised."

### **Leaving our shells behind**

From time to time, lobsters have to leave their shells in order to grow. They need the shell to protect them from being torn apart, yet when they grow, the old shell must be abandoned. If they did not abandon it, the old shell would soon become their prison--and finally their casket. The tricky part for the lobster is the brief period of time between when the old shell is discarded and the new one is formed. During that terribly vulnerable period, the transition must be scary to the lobster. Currents gleefully cartwheel them from coral to kelp. Hungry schools of fish are ready to make them a part of their food chain. For awhile at least, that old shell must look pretty good. We are not so different from lobsters. To change and grow, we must sometimes shed our shells--a structure, a framework--we've depended on. Discipleship means being so committed to Christ that when he bids us to follow, we will change, risk, grow, and leave our "shells" behind.

### **Spiritually Malnourished**

One spring a family was driving from Fort Lauderdale to Tampa, Florida. As far as the eye could see, orange trees were loaded with fruit. When we stopped for breakfast, the father ordered orange juice with my eggs. "I'm sorry," the waitress said. "I can't bring you orange juice. Our machine is broken." At first he was dumbfounded. They were surrounded by millions of oranges, and he knew they had oranges in the kitchen--orange slices garnished our plates. What was the problem? No juice? Hardly. We were surrounded by thousands of gallons of juice. The problem was they had become dependent on a machine to get it. Christians are sometimes like that. They may be surrounded by Bibles in their homes, but if something should happen to the Sunday morning preaching service, they would have no nourishment for their souls. The problem is not a lack of spiritual food--but that many Christians haven't grown enough to know how to get it for themselves.

### **Learning to become a navigator**

Old salts like to tell the story of the young sailor learning to become a navigator. Aboard the ship at sea, the captain said to him, "Please tell us where we are." So the sailor took a sextant and made the complicated set of calculations. After a while, he wrote down the coordinates of longitude and latitude and handed it to the captain. The captain studied it for a while, checked his charts, and said to the young navigator, "Are you absolutely convinced that these are the right coordinates?" "Yes, sir, I'm absolutely convinced." "You know exactly where we are?" "Yes, sir." "There could be no conceivable mistake in your calculations?" "Absolutely not, sir. I've done my best." Then the captain said, "Well, then I would suggest you put on a jacket." "Why, sir?" "Because according to your calculations, we are planted squarely at the top of Mount Washington." **Citation: Gordon MacDonald, "When Religion Becomes Serious Business," Preaching Today, Tape No. 142.**

### **Hebrews 5:11-6:12**

<sup>11</sup>We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. <sup>12</sup>In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! <sup>13</sup>Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. <sup>14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. <sup>6:1</sup>Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup>instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. <sup>3</sup>And God permitting, we will do so. <sup>4</sup>It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, <sup>5</sup>who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, <sup>6</sup>if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. <sup>7</sup>Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. <sup>8</sup>But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. <sup>9</sup>Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case--things that accompany salvation. <sup>10</sup>God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. <sup>11</sup>We desire for each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. <sup>12</sup>We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.[NIV]

### **Hebrews 10:21-25**

<sup>21</sup>Since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup>let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup>Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup>And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup>Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.