**Preaching from Hebrews**

Barossa Ministers Fraternal

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1. **The Problem**

* Why go to church?
* Three challenges to the congregation
* Inattention to what they have heard ►drifting away (2:1)
* Laziness in hearing ►spiritual immaturity (5:11)
* Persecution ►Unbelief and apostasy (3:12; 6:6; 10:32-39)
* Issue: reception of ***the better things that belong to salvation*** (6:9)
* The blood of Jesus that speaks something better (12:24
* Better hope of access to God (7:19)
* Better covenant (7:22; 8:6) based on better promises (8:6)
* Purification by better sacrifices (9:23)
* Better possession (10:34)
* Better fatherland (11:16)
* Better resurrection (11:23)
* Better provision for all faithful people (11:40)
* Educational picture: spiritual infancy ►full spiritual adulthood as holy service in the heavenly sanctuary
* Focus: access to heaven here on earth in the divine service

1. **Readings from Hebrews in the Lectionary**

* Year B: propers 22-28 (October 7-November 18)
* Year C: Advent 4, propers 14-17
* Yearly: Christmas 3, Presentation, Good Friday, Annunciation

1. **Hebrews as a Word of Encouragement: 13:22**

* ὁ λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως: technical term from the synagogue for practical exposition of the Scriptures (Acts 13:15)
* Hebrews as a written sermon from absent pastor for reading in the divine service
* Use of the ministerial “we”
* Readings: Gen 14:18-20; Jeremiah 31:31-34?
* Text: Psalm 110
* Congregation in Rome?
* Model of liturgical preaching
* Preaching in the divine service with application in it
* Place for reception of gifts: “Free food” ► “Free food here now”
* Emphasis on liturgical location
* Christ’s entry on our behalf into ***the Inner Place*** (6:19-20), ***the Holy Place*** (9:12), which is heaven itself (9:25)
* Christ’s enthronement as king and priest ***at God’s right hand*** in his heavenly temple palace (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)
* Our entry into God’s promised ***place of rest*** (4:1, 3, 6, 10)
* Our way for entry into ***the heavenly sanctuary*** (8:8; 10:19)
* Our ***approach*** to God (7:19, 25; 11:6)
* on his throne (4:16)
* in the heavenly sanctuary (10:19-22)
* in heavenly Jerusalem (12:22)
* Emphasis on the liturgical ***now*** (2:9; 8:6; 9:26; 11:16; 12:26) and on God’s ***today***, the time of the Son’s exaltation, the time for hearing God’s voice (1:5; 3:7, 13,15; 4:7; 5:5; 13:8)
* Stance of the author
* His anonymity
* His self-effacement as a speaker to make room for God’s voice
* The inclusive “we” for himself as a hearer among other hearers of God’s word
* Movement from scriptural exposition to practical exhortation: reception
* Use of twelve cohortative first person plural liturgical exhortations
* Let us be fearful of not entering God’s place of rest: 4:1
* Let us be eager to enter that place of rest: 4:14
* Let us hold fast to the confession of Jesus as God’s Son: 4:14
* Let us approach the throne of grace: 4:16
* Let us be carried on (by God) to full involvement in the heavenly service: 6:1
* Let us approach the heavenly sanctuary: 10:22
* Let us retain the confession of our hope: 10:23
* Let us consider mutual provocation to love and good works by assembling together: 10:24
* Let us look to Jesus, the author and completer of faith: 12:1
* Let us have grace/gratitude for the performance of God-pleasing service: 12:28
* Let us go to Jesus outside the camp of earthly Jerusalem: 13:13
* Let us offer a regular sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus: 13:15
* Two approaches to interpretation
* Modern approach: the use of cultic imagery as a metaphor for redemption and our personal relationship with God ► Christology and personal spirituality
* Old approach: use of divine service in an earthly sanctuary as an analogy for divine service in the heavenly sanctuary ► practical liturgical theology and piety

1. **An Appeal to the Liturgical Imagination**

* Modern obsession with abstraction: abstract concepts, principles and doctrines
* Challenge of Scott Stephens: compelling vision rather than persuasion by argument
* Use of imagery in Hebrews to appeal to four senses for the perception of what transcends them
* The goal of instruction in 5:14: ***senses*** trained to distinguish what is spiritually good from what is spiritually evil
* Result of the incarnation: fleshly communion between the high priest and his brothers (2:14)
* Hebrews as a sermon on the incarnation of our Lord
* The sense of hearing: hearing what God is saying
* The need for ***close attention*** ***to what they have heard*** (2:1, 3)
* ***God’s speaking*** to them in the divine service through the prophets and by his Son (1:2)
* God’s speaking of good news to his faithful people (4:2)
* God as the one who speaks from heaven to people on earth in the divine service (12:25)
* Warning against hardening of heart against his voice (3:7, 15; 4:7)
* ***The Son’s speaking*** the word of salvation to the apostles (2:3)
* The Son’s proclamation of God’s name to his brothers (2:12)
* His blood that speaks something better than Abel (12:22)
* The speaking of God’s word to the congregation by its ***leaders*** and by ***the author*** (13:7, 22; cf. use of ministerial ***we*** in 4:13; 5:11; 6:1)
* Use of the oracles of God in the OT (5:12)
* Use of the word of Christ (6:1)
* Citation of the Old Testament as ***God’s speaking*** rather than a written text
* He said: past speaking (1:5)
* He has said: ongoing speaking (1:13; 4:3)
* He says: liturgical present (1:6, 7; 3:7; 5:6; 8:8; 10:5)
* Listening in on ***the conversation between the Father and the Son***
* The Father with his Son: 1:5a, 8-13; 5:5-6; 7:17, 21
* The Son with the Father: 2:12; 10:5-7
* Hearing ***the voice*** of all three persons of the Trinity in the Old Testament as present with us in the divine service
* God the Father: 1:5-13; 5:5-6; 6:14; 10:5-7
* The Son: 2:12-13; 8:8-12.
* The Spirit: 3:7-11; 10:15-17
* The sense of sight: seeing what God is saying
* Climax of exposition in the contrast between two ***theophanies*** in 12:18-25: terrifying sight v the speaking blood
* God told Moses to ***see*** the heavenly model for the earthly tabernacle (8:5)
* By faith Moses ***looked forward*** to his promised reward (11:26)
* By faith Moses as a ***seer*** was devoted to ***the Unseen One*** (11:27)
* The Son is the ***radiant reflection*** of God’s glory (1:3)
* He has ***been shown*** at the end of the ages to put away sin (9:26)
* He now is ***visible/appears*** before the face of God on our behalf (9:24)
* He ***will be seen*** a second time for the salvation of those who wait for him (9:28)
* He invites us to ***see*** him in our assembly presenting us as God’s children (2:13)
* Holiness as the condition for ***seeing*** the Lord (12:14)
* We have been enlightened (6:4)
* We ***see*** Jesus crowned with glory and honour (2:9)
* We ***contemplate/consider*** Jesus the apostle and high priest of our confession (3:1)
* We ***look at*** Jesus the author and completer of faith (12:2)
* We ***see*** Israel’s failure to enter God’s rest because of their unbelief (3:19)
* We are urged to ***see***
* Ourselves addressed by the Holy Spirit in Ps 95:7-11 with a warning against a heart of unbelief (3:12)
* The greatness of Melchizedek (7:4)
* God speaking to us from heaven (12:23)
* The faithful preachers as a life model for imitation (13:7)
* Faith in Hebrews 11 as ***seeing*** what God has ***foreseen*** for all believers (11:40)
* Summary in 11:1

*Faith is the basis of what is hoped for,*

*the conviction of things not* ***seen****.*

* By faith we ***perceive*** that what ***appears*** was not made from what is ***seen*** (11:3)
* By faith Enoch did not ***see*** death (11:5)
* By faith Noah was told about ***invisible things*** (11:7)
* By faith the patriarchs***saw*** the things that God had promised without receiving them (11:13)
* Goal: common eschatological liturgical vision rather than mystical experience
* The sense of taste: tasting what God is saying and giving
* Jesus has ***tasted*** death on behalf of everyone (2:9)
* The teaching of God’s word as ***milk*** and ***solid food*** (5:12-14)
* We have***tasted*** God’s heavenly gift, God’s good utterance and the powers of the age to come (6:4-5).
* We ***eat*** food from a heavenly altar (13:9-10)
* The danger of ***embittering*** God by hardening hearts (3:8, 14) and fellow Christians by rejecting God’s grace (12:15-16)
* The sense of touch: receiving what God is saying and giving
* We have had our bodies ***washed*** with pure water (10:22)
* We have been ***sprinkled*** (10:22; 12:24; cf. 9:13, 19), ***cleansed*** (9:14) and ***sanctified*** (10:29; 13:12) by the blood of Jesus
* We ***receive*** mercy from God (4:16)
* We ***have*** seven eschatological gifts
* Jesus as its high priest (4:14, 15; 8:1; 10:21)
* Strong encouragement (6:18-19)
* Free access to the heavenly sanctuary (10:19)
* The lasting possession of something good (10:34)
* A cloud of witnesses around us (12:1)
* God’s grace (12:28)
* A new altar outside earthly Jerusalem (13:10)
* We ***hold***
* The privilege of access to God that we boast of (3:6)
* Our baptismal foundation for participation in Christ (3:14)
* The confession of Jesus as God’s Son (4:14)
* The hope of our confession (10:23)

1. **The Teaching in Hebrews of Jesus as King and Priest**

* The separation of kingship and priesthood in the OT
* The anointing of the high priest and the king with the most holy anointing oil as an ‘anointed person’: ***messiah*** *=* ***christ***
* God’s anointing of his Son Jesus as ***King and Priest***: see the careful use of the title ***Christ*** and ***the Christ*** twelve times in Hebrews (3:6, 14; 5:5; 6:1; 9:11, 14, 24, 28; 10:10; 11:26; 13:8, 21)
* God’s call of Jesus like Aaron (5:4-5)
* Jesus as royal priest in the order of Melchizedek rather than Aaron (5:9; 6:20; 7:11)
* The fulfilment of Ps 110 by the exaltation of Jesus which is both his royal enthronement and his priestly ordination/installation
* Throne of grace: royal throne and ark with mercy seat
* The ***perfection*** of Jesus and his ***perfecting***of us
* Misunderstanding of ***perfection*** as moral purity and sinlessness: no need for Jesus to be perfected
* Greek noun: τέλος = goal
* Greek verb: τελειουν = bring to the goal, complete, finish.
* God’s goal as our full participation in the heavenly service with all the angels and all his saints (3:14; 6:11)
* Derivation from the term: ‘the filling of hands’ for ***the ordination of the priests*** in Ex 29 and Lev 8 as set of repeated rites over seven days
* Daily purification by a sin offering
* Daily smearing of right thumb, right ear and right big toe with blood from the ordination offering
* Daily filling of hands with the ordination offering and the holy food for them from it
* Daily sprinkling with the most holy anointing oil mixed with most holy blood from the altar for their consecration
* ***God’s perfecting of Jesus*** as a process that began with his baptism, culminated in his death as an act of self-offering and was completed at his ascension (2:10; 5:9; 7:28)
* ***The perfecting of our conscience by Jesus*** as our ordination for divine service with him in the heavenly sanctuary (6:1; 10:1, 14; cf. 7:11, 18; 9:9)
* The completion of our ordination at our death and the resurrection of all the faithful (11:40; 12:23).
* The role of Jesus as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (2:17; 3:1, 2; 4:14-15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:21, 24; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21)
* Our ***pioneer*** (2:10; 12:2)
* The ***completer*** of faith (12:2)
* The ***source*** of eternal salvation (5:9)
* Our ***forerunner*** into the heavenly sanctuary (6:20)
* The ***broker*** of a better covenant (7:22)
* The ***liturgist*** in the heavenly sanctuary with a better liturgy than

the daily service of the old covenant (8:2, 6)

* The ***mediator*** of a better new covenant in Holy Communion (8:6; 9:15: 12:24)
* The present service of Jesus as high priest in the heavenly sanctuary
* He ***appears*** before God the Father on our behalf (9:24).
* He ***makes atonement*** for the sins of the people (2:17).
* He ***cleanses*** our conscience with his blood for the service of the

living God (9:14)

* He ***consecrates*** us with his blood (2:11; 10:29; 13:12)
* He presents us with himself to the Father (2:13).
* He ***intercedes*** with God the Father on our behalf (7:25).
* He ***praises*** his heavenly Father and ***proclaims*** his name to us

(2:12).

* We approach God the Father ***through*** him (7:25; cf. 7:19) and offer our sacrifices of praise ***through*** him (13:15, 16).
* Our high priestly status: ***holy brothers*** of Jesus the high priest

1. **Four Key Passages**

* **Hebrews 4:1-13: entry into God’s place of rest**
* In ancient Babylon the gods made humans serve them by providing for their necessities, so that they could have rest.
* According to Genesis 2:2-3, God created humans to rest with him.
* At Sinai he instituted the Sabbath as the ***day of rest*** for them (Ex 16:26-29; 20:8-11; 31:12-17).
* Instead of doing ritual work for him, they rested with him.
* He blessed and sanctified them through their resting with him on that day.
* He gave them the land (Deut 12:9; Josh 1:13) and the temple (1 Kgs 8:56) as their ***place of rest*** with him (Ps 132:8, 14; 1 Chr 28:2; 2 Chron 6:41).
* In Psalm 95 the Levitical choir called on the people to join with them in praising the Lord at the temple on the Sabbath.
* They urged the people to **listen to God's voice.**
* They warned the people that those who did not listen would not enter God's place of rest.
* Jesus has fulfilled God's promise to provide a place of rest for his people.
* The Israelites did not enter God's heavenly place of rest, because they did not ***believe*** in the gospel (Heb 4:2, 6; cf. 3:16-19).
* We who believe the gospel now enter that heavenly ***place of rest*** (Heb 4:3) just as we continue to strive to enter it once and for all (4:11)
* That is the place for the eternal ***Sabbath celebration*** for all God’s people (σαββατισμὸς τῷ λαῷ τοῦ θεοῦ).
* Through faith in the gospel we cease from our labours, as God did from his (Heb 4:10), because we can rely on what Christ has accomplished for us and receive the benefits of his work (cf. Heb 3:6, 17).
* We enter God's rest by listening to the word of God which judges and saves us (Heb 4:12-13).
* His***living*** word makes and keeps us spiritually alive.
* His ***energising*** word changes and empowers us.
* His ***penetrating*** word deals with the evil at the very core of our bodies and spirits.
* His ***critical*** word judges and exposes the secrets of our hearts: by it God operates on us like a surgeon to fix us up
* We enter God's rest by listening to that word in the divine service.
* There God's word is spoken powerfully to us.
* Through it He does his work with us and in us there.
* There we rest from our work listening to God and letting him do his work in us.
* **Hebrews 4:14-16: our audience with the heavenly King**
* Two key terms
* The use of ***προσέρχομαι*** as a technical liturgical term seven times
* Use in the LXX for ***approaching*** of God either at the altar or in the Holy Place
* Use here for our approach of God in the heavenly sanctuary (4:16; 7:25; 10:1, 22; 11:6; 12: 18, 22)
* The use in Hebrews of παρρησία as ***outspokenness*** (3:6;

4:16; 10:19, 35).

* Right of free speech in the public assembly of a

Greek city state

* Freedom of speech in public domain
* Free access to speak to a public official
* Confidence in approaching and addressing God
* In the ancient world kings held a public audience with their citizens on certain occasions to receive petitions and complaints from them.
* They sat on a throne in throne room or a public place.
* People could approach and petition them there for mercy and help.
* In the OT God was enthroned on the mercy seat in the temple between the cherubim.
* It was Israel's ***throne of grace***.
* They addressed their petitions to him at the altar in the

divine service

* As God's royal Son Jesus sits with God on his heavenly throne
* He has bridged the gap between the God in heaven and us on earth by passing through the heavens.
* As our high priest he ***sympathises*** with us and brings us with him into the Father's presence.
* We can ***approach*** God the heavenly king with boldly with ***freedom of speech*** before him.
* We ***receive*** ***mercy***: pardon for sin and acceptance as God’s royal sons and Christ’s brothers.
* We ***find grace for timely help*** from the King for our own needs and for the needs of others.
* Worship as ***reception*** from God
* **Hebrews 10:19-22: our access to the heavenly sanctuary**
* Limited access to God in the Old Testament
* Access of Israelites to the altar for burnt offering
* Access of the priests to the Holy Place in the daily service
* Access of the high priest to the Holy of Holies: veiled in a

cloud of incense

* Entry of high priest on the Day of Atonement
* Consecration by blood mixed with anointing oil which was sprinkled on his body
* Washing of whole body with water
* Entry through double layered curtain
* Entrance with blood from the sin offerings: bull for priests and goat for people
* Sprinkling of blood: mercy seat and floor, incense altar and floor, altar for burnt offering
* Sanctification of holy way for God to meet with his people at the altar for burnt offering
* Two great gifts that we all have
* Right of entry into God’s heavenly house
* Jesus as our high priest
* Our ***entry***
* Entry: holy way into God’s presence
* Double sense of τὰ ἁγία in Hebrews
* Term for the Holy Place in the tabernacle (9:1, 2) in contrast with the Holy of Holies (9:3) which is also called the Holy Place (9:24, 25; 13:11)
* Place for entry = **Holy of Holies**, heavenly sanctuary, God’s presence, God’s throne, the throne of grace: 8:2; 10:19
* **The holy things** that give access to it: 9:8 ► the body and blood of Jesus?
* Our privilege of access: free speech in approaching God
* Contrast: restricted access ► open access to God
* The ***new and living way***
* Inaugurated and consecrated by Jesus
* Living way: life-giving risen Lord
* Way of his living flesh and blood rather than the

flesh and blood of a dead animal

* Jesus as our ***high priest*** in the heavenly ***house of God***
* Merciful in bringing God’s gifts to us: exit and descent
* Faithful in bringing us to God: entry and ascent
* Open access to the heavenly sanctuary together with Jesus
* Phrase **i*n his blood*:**  allusion to Holy Communion from Luke 22: 20 and 1 Cor 11:25
* Sprinkling of hearts with the blood of Jesus: holy hearts
* Contrast with sprinkled bodies of priests (Heb 9:13-14)
* Blood for sprinkling: the speaking blood as seventh gift in 12:24
* ***Washing of* bodies** with water in baptism: pure bodies
* Our approach through the ***flesh*** and ***blood*** of Jesus in Holy Communion
* Double sense of πληροφορία in 10:22
* ***Full delivery*** of an assured and assuring gift
* ***Full assurance*** that it brings: answer to fear of rejection
* ***Faith*** as full assurance of our favourable reception by God
* Basis: our washing and sprinkling
* Assured access through faith in Jesus
* Our qualification for entry: ***sprinkling of hearts***
* ***Bad conscience* ►**good conscience (13:18)
* Conscience cleansed for divine service (9:14)
* Access to the Father’s presence through the divine service

* **Hebrews12:18-25: our participation in the heavenly service**
* ***God’s fearful theophany*** with his inaccessible presence at Sinai in *seven* fearful ways
* A tangible, fenced mountain (cf. Exod 19:11-13; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
* Blazing fire (Exod 19:18; Deut 4:11, 33, 36; 5:22-26)
* Darkness (Deut 4:11; 5:23)
* Eerie gloom (Exod 20:21; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
* Storm cloud (Exod 19:16; 20:18; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
* Sound of trumpet (Exod 19:16, 19; 20:18)
* ***God’s voice speaking*** the Decalogue to the congregation of Israel (Exod 19:19; 20:19; Deut 4:12,33,36; 5:22-27)
* ***God's gracious theophany*** in heavenly Jerusalem where we

have access to seven invisible realities.

* ***Heavenly Jerusalem*** on Mount Zion where God is present and heaven meets earth
* ***The angels*** who assist us in adoration and praise (1:14; Luke 2:13-14; Rev 4:8-11; 5:9-14)
* ***The heavenly assembly*** (ἐκκλησίᾳ) of God's people: all first born sons with full rights of inheritance
* ***God the Judge*** who condemns sin and pardons penitent people
* ***Perfected saints*** with their perfect adoration and praise (see the cloud of witnesses in12:1)
* ***Jesus*** as the mediator of new covenant in the Lord's Supper
* ***Blood for sprinkling*** that speaks pardon, cleansing and holiness (see 9:14; 10:22; 1 Pet 1:2): most important as it links us with the other six gifts
* In the divine service God/the risen Lord Jesus **speaks** to the faithful from heaven (12:25).

1. **Conclusion**

* See Hebrews 9:14: ***How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit has offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works for the service of the living God.***
* ***Service***: τὸ λατρεύειν = liturgical service (8:5; 9:9; 10:2; 13:10)
* Purpose of preaching: delivery of a cleansed conscience for ***service*** with Jesus in the heavenly sanctuary

Sermon on Hebrews 12:22-24

Year C Proper 16

Access denied! Restricted access! Staff access only! No public access! Such notices confront us all over the place, in computers and on documents, on buildings and at mining sites. They remind us that we do not always have access to all places. Access is often a matter of privilege rather than of right.

This applies most of all to people. Only my wife has access to me as her husband; only my children have access to me as their father and to my home; my students have some access to me as their teacher. Access to people is always restricted. In fact, no one ever has the right of open access to another person. It is always a privilege, something granted which can never be taken for granted.

The letter to the Hebrews tells us that, we amazingly, have unrestricted access to God in worship. That word was used secularly in the Greek world for the privilege of free speech in the public assembly of the city state. It also referred to boldness in speaking to a king or some other public figure.

Each of you is presently involved in an extraordinary transaction which occurs extraordinarily in an extraordinary place. And that place is here! Here heaven breaks in on each of you earthlings. You have access to heaven right here at this place on earth. Here in this plain divine service you join a heavenly assembly engaged in heavenly worship.

But all that is hidden from the naked eye. It is a matter of mystery which God’s word discloses to you. Apart from his word you would never discover it and could not experience its richness. This mystery involves you in the seven invisible realities which are listed in our text.

**1. *You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem.*** You are therefore right now in two places at one and the same time. On the one hand, you have gathered together as a congregation in this place of worship. There’s nothing very special about it except that this is where you hear the word of God and receive the holy sacrament. On the other hand, you are also in heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God, which is not located here on earth, even though you have access to it here on earth.

You may remember that Solomon built his temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. There in the Holy of Holies heaven overlapped with earth. Only the high priest had access to God’s heavenly presence there once a year on the Day of Atonement. But you have not gathered there. When you came here to church today, you entered heaven itself. You are now in the city of the living God where God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit reside. This city is in this world but does not belong to this world. Here you have access to the heavenly presence of God. Here you by faith enter the heavenly world, without leaving planet earth. Here you join in the performance of the heavenly liturgy.

1. ***You have come to innumerable angels in festal assembly.*** You are not just surrounded by other human beings as you worship here; you are surrounded on all sides by thousands and thousands of angels. More than you can count!

The angels are God’s heavenly servants. The writer of the Hebrews calls them ‘liturgising spirits’ (1:14). Their main occupation is the performance of the heavenly liturgy. They gather in a festal assembly to praise and adore the risen Lord Jesus. They tell us of God’s glory and his holiness. Amazingly, they invite us to join with them in their praises. Since we, like them, are holy, we stand with them singing: ‘Glory to God in the highest’ and ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’. In fact, they act as a kind of spiritual choir for us and assist us in our praises. They help us to adore and to glorify the Triune God. They share their wonder at the Father’s grace and their joy at the Son’s gift of peace to us. As we lift up our hearts and our spirits to the Lord, they carry us along and blend our song with their song. We therefore join the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven as we adore and magnify the living God in the liturgy for Holy Communion.

1. ***You have come to the assembly of the first born who are enrolled in heaven.*** Here in heavenly Jerusalem you are part of a huge assembly, a supernatural, universal congregation which includes this congregation as well as every other congregation on the whole wide world, for they all assemble, as we do, in the same place, the presence of the Triune God. So then, you never worship in a small congregation. Whenever and wherever you gather for worship in the name of Jesus, you gather together with all believers everywhere; you worship together with them, no matter how far you may be separated from them in time and space. You join the whole church of God as it assembles in his holy presence.

As members of that assembly in heavenly Jerusalem you have special status. On the one hand, you are citizens of heaven. The Triune God is your divine king, and you enjoy all the rights and privileges of citizenship in his royal city. You enjoy the life of heaven already here on earth.

On the other hand, you have the status of God’s first born son. Which is almost too good to be true! In the ancient world the firstborn son inherited the position and property of his father. Well, since Jesus is the firstborn only Son of God, he alone is God’s heir. But he has wonderfully and generously shared his position and his status with you in your baptism. Each of you, therefore, has the same status as Jesus, and you all stand to inherit everything that belongs to Jesus. But you don’t have to wait until you die to enter your inheritance. In fact, you are here today with all the other members of God’s royal family to receive and enjoy your common spiritual inheritance, for, unlike material possessions which can be owned exclusively, spiritual blessings are always shared and held in common. You are therefore far more privileged and spiritually rich than you could ever imagine. All that is Christ’s is yours for the asking!

1. **You have come to God the judge of all.** Here in heavenly Jerusalem you meet with God the divine judge. And there is no escaping from his judgment. Now that may be enough to scare off the bravest and best of you, because you have a guilty conscience. You know that you are not as you should be and have not lived as you should have. Many of you therefore fear God’s accusation and condemnation more than anything in this life. It’s bad enough that we have to face God on judgment day. Who of us would wish to face God before we had to?

But God is present here as a judge with a difference. He isn’t out to disapprove of you, belittle you, and reject you as worthless and useless and ugly. No, he comes to free you from the burden of guilt and to undo the awful aftermath of sin; he comes to pardon you, as he did at the beginning of this service when he spoke the word of absolution to you. You therefore have no reason to be afraid of contact with him. You don’t have to wait until you die to discover where you stand with God. You can settle your accounts with him now, so that you need no longer fear his judgment and condemnation. So why live evasively with a bad conscience and the fear of eventual punishment? Welcome God’s gracious judgment and receive his pardon now! Only those who are forgiven have access to heaven here on earth.

1. ***You have come to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.*** Imagine yourself as a runner in a relay race. The Christians who have left this life have run in the race before you. They have passed on the baton to you; they now sit in the stadium and urge you on as you run your lap in the race. They wait for you and the people who come after you to finish the race so that they can celebrate together with you once the race is over. They have arrived but you are still running.

You did not invent the gospel and the divine service. You received it from your spiritual ancestors who taught you how to worship. They depend on you to be faithful in worshipping the Triune God and in handing on what you have received to those who come after you. You sing their hymns and pray their prayers.

Even though they are separated physically from you by death, they are still linked with you spiritually through Jesus. He keeps you in touch with them and them in touch with you. You may, therefore, more properly remember your loved ones at the Lord’s table rather than at the cemetery. They surround you, as Hebrews says, like ‘a cloud’ (12:1), and support you invisibly, just as all the other people do who worship together with you. Since you are connected with them in the communion of saints, they are involved together with you in the praise of the Triune God.

1. **You have come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.** Heavenly worship centres on the risen Lord Jesus. He is the key to our involvement in it. Without him we remain earthbound and without access to the heavenly realm. He has bridged the great gap between heaven and earth for us by his death and resurrection. He is now our high priest, our mediator in the heavenly sanctuary. There he stands in for us with God and stands in for God with us. He links us with all the angels, Christians all over the world, departed believers and our heavenly Father. Our extraordinary position and status depends on him and his gracious presence with us.

Jesus has set up a new covenant for us by the institution of Holy Communion, a new way of worship, in which he gives us his body and blood. In his holy supper he reaches out to us earthlings and joins us where we are here on earth. By giving himself entirely to us, he unites us intimately and inseparably with himself. In the celebration of the divine service which revolves around this sacrament, he acts as our high priest, our chief liturgist. He not only brings the gifts of God the Father to us but also leads us in our prayers and praises. We can therefore approach God the Father through him, together with him, standing, as it were, in his shoes.

In the divine service he comes to us here in this place, so that we can be with him in the presence of his heavenly Father. He brings heaven down to earth for us and takes us earthlings up into the heavenly sanctuary, so that we stand with him and all the angels in the presence of his heavenly Father. He shares our life so that we can share in his divine life as God’s Son already now in this life. What could be more wonderful than that!

1. **You have come to the blood for sprinkling that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.** What a surprise! The heart of Christian worship is not the presence of the risen Lord Jesus but the gift of his holy precious blood in the sacrament, for only through his blood do we have access to heaven and the angels and the universal church and God the judge and the faithful departed and Jesus.

In the Old Testament only the priests were allowed to approach God and officiate in the divine service of the temple. Before they could officiate they had their bodies sprinkled with blood at their ordination into the priesthood to cleanse them from impurity and to make them holy. The right ears of the priests were smeared with blood, so that they could hear the holy word of God; the thumbs of their right hands were smeared with blood, so that they could handle the holy things of God; the big toes of their right feet were smeared with blood, so that they could walk on holy ground. And then blood mixed with the holy anointing oil was sprinkled on them and their vestments to consecrate them. In this way God shared his holiness with them. They could approach God only as long as they remained clean and holy.

In heavenly Jerusalem each of you can do what no priest ever did in the Old Testament. You can approach God the Father in the heavenly sanctuary and serve there together with Jesus. Jesus has not just sprinkled your bodies with his blood; he sprinkles it on your hearts, your conscience. Amazingly, he gives you his blood to drink in Holy Communion. And that blood speaks something good to you. It doesn’t speak of vengeance and banishment, as the blood of Abel did to his brother who had murdered him. No, it speaks of grace and pardon and acceptance. By giving you his life-giving blood to drink, Jesus cleanses you entirely from the sins which you have committed as well as the sins which have been committed against you. Through his blood he shares his own purity and holiness with you. He makes you as holy as he is holy, holy through and through. His blood consecrates you as holy priests for service with the angels in the heavenly sanctuary. You can therefore approach God the Father boldly and unafraid, because you have been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus. You can bring others and their needs to your heavenly Father, even as you mysteriously bring him and his blessing to the people around you as you go about your daily work.

Well then where are you as you come to Holy Communion today? You come to an extraordinary place which makes you extraordinary people. You are people who live double lives as citizens of heaven here on earth. Your ordinary life with its everyday routines is but the façade of something far richer and deeper and more expansive, for you are holy people who live heavenly lives on earth. Wherever you go, the Triune God goes with you. Wherever you happen to be, you have open access to God’s presence. So no matter how ordinary you may appear, you are all secretly extraordinary people engaged in a truly extraordinary project.

You are holy people because you are involved here and now in the divine service together with Jesus and all the angels. That makes you and everything that happens to you far more significant than you could ever imagine. Treasure the privileged of worship and live as in God’s presence while you go about your daily business! Be holy as Christ has made you holy! To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.