

"The Anchor Cross: The Cross of Hope"

Hebrews 6:13-20

Midweek Lent 2

Messiah, Boerne

February 28, 2024

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Text: Hebrews 6:13-20

Dear Friends in Christ:

Words can change their meaning as time goes by, and sometimes ideas also change their sense as surrounding circumstances change. This is part of the reason why there are so many new Bible translations in our day and age. Old translations may need a revision of vocabulary and phraseology in order to speak to people more plainly today. But sometimes we're just stuck with a word, so-to-speak. It can't be interpreted simply by a new word or phrase. There it stands, and thus it needs to be dealt with.

We have three such instances in our text for this evening. First, the idea of the "promise" and/or "oath," which stands at the very heart of the text. The second important word in our text is "hope." It, too, has undergone considerable change from the time it was used in Hebrews. If the meaning of this word is reduced to what we generally understand when we speak of "hope" in our day, we will lose the thrust of the text. The third strong image is the simple word "anchor." An anchor had a

symbolic meaning that we have lost to a large extent in our day when so much commerce is conducted by land or air.

When the strength of these three words in our text is restored to the meaning and sense in Jesus' day, we will find a strong assurance from God that His promises hold us anchored safely in and through Christ when the storms of life surround us and threaten to destroy us.

First, the words *promise* and *oath*. It's not unusual to hear promises made almost frivolously. "Come again soon," we are told as we leave a friend's home. "I will. I promise," we respond, knowing full well that we will not be back anytime in the near future. Oaths are made with equal casualness. Oaths and promises were taken much more seriously in the days when Hebrews was written and in the days of Abraham, concerning whom the oath and the promise were made. A person's word was all that was necessary for most kinds of transactions in biblical times, so long as it was properly witnessed. Even without a witness, a promise was still a very serious—almost sacred—word. That's difficult to comprehend in a time and society where written contracts and deeds, notarized written agreements, and legal documents are vital to our business and personal activities. We must recognize that the mere spoken word was legally binding in the days of our text. The power of our

text's message depends on our understanding this power of a spoken promise or oath.

That message leans on a promise God made to Abraham, the father of Israel and an honored father of the Christian faith. He left his native land under a special promise from God that he would father a great nation. Finally, an oath was added to that promise after Abraham had demonstrated his great trust in God by being willing to sacrifice his only son, the son of his old age, Isaac. The writer points to this event: "When God made his promise to Abraham . . . He confirmed it with an oath. He did this so that . . . we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged" (6:13-18). The whole passage depends on understanding that oaths required two witnesses or one witness and an "oath to God." God staked His honor on what He promised Abraham, affirming in the oath His original promise that already in itself bound Him by honor to fulfill it.

Think of it this way: "Do you think God can lie? Or is He bound to keep His word once He gives it?" This line of reasoning is then drawn out over the lives of *all* those who are Abraham's descendants and of the faith that comes through him, confirming the promise of God to Abraham by extension to *all* his descendants. The people to whom the book of Hebrews is addressed seem to be wavering badly in the faith, and the writer

is trying to shore up their faith. He does this by pointing to God's faithfulness. You can always trust God's word, the writer insists. "And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised" (v 15). This is the encouragement that lies under this strong emphasis on God's promise and/or oath.

Second, the word *hope*. The strong sense of an oath and promise that must necessarily be kept if God's honor is to be upheld governs the meaning of this text. It provides the solid foundation for the word *hope*. In our day, hope often amounts to little more than wishful thinking. Sometimes it's a bit stronger—a yearning, a longing for something. Biblical usage is different, however, and expresses certainty, confidence, and assurance. Such certainty is based on the promise of God. It's reinforced with an oath on His honor that, just as He cared for Abraham and kept all His promises to him, so He will also care for us.

The comfort of this hope is that it carries with it the assurance that God sees and knows your needs. His promises raise hope precisely because He sees the desperation with which all of us live so much of our lives. To "hope in God" is to believe that He realizes how deeply the whole world is mired in the mud of sin with all its consequences. He comes to break you loose from the web that holds you, to remove the sting from your sin, to take away the victory the grave wants to claim when you

die. As God once stood in the midst of the fiery serpents in the wilderness where Israel felt the threat of extinction, so He stands in the midst of our economic muddling, our diseases and weaknesses, our worries and fears. He stands with arms extended and with hope written large across His breast, and He gathers us under the assurance that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

This promise is supported with His oath. God did this so that we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us might be greatly encouraged (vv 17-18). The oath that supports His promise is none less than the Word made flesh, enthroned on the cross, and crowned with thorns. God raised hope in our midst through the suffering, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will not fail you if you put your trust in Him. What He says, He does.

Now, the anchor is the easiest of the three words we introduced earlier to describe physically. We have all seen pictures of anchors even if we have not handled one personally. It's a heavy item, usually equipped with some sort of hook to grab hold of the bed beneath the water to keep the ship from drifting when a stable mooring is necessary. It holds the ship in place when tides or storms threaten to drive it from its appointed place of rest.

In times of old, the anchor was a symbol for anything that proved stable when everything around was being dashed to pieces.

It described something that enabled a person to weather a storm swirling around him or her. Such usages are found even in philosophical writings of the ancient world when seafaring gave rise to many figures of speech.

The early Christians found great meaning and comfort in the Anchor Cross, the focus of our service this evening. It identified and expressed a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith. This form of the cross, used from early days of Christianity, was especially important during the time of persecution before Christianity became legitimate under the rule of the Roman emperor Constantine. It was especially useful since Christians, who could be killed for their faith, could display it openly without fear. Perhaps it was already emerging as a primary Christian symbol when the writer of this evening's text said, "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (v 19).

In putting all these elements together, we find the inner kernel of how this text addresses you and me. Threatened health, financial concerns, doubts and questions of faith, trembling in the very shadows of death—our own or that of a loved one—are all interconnected with the storms that threaten to blow you off your moorings, causing an aimless drift out onto the sea of life. The storms can come up so quickly and bowl so fiercely that you hardly know which way to turn or, shaking from

the fury, where you can feel safe. Sometimes you may wonder whether the very foundation of the earth is shaking from the fury that rages around your existence.

The sign of the cross set before your eyes this evening is designed to bring a sense of security into such troubled waters of life. The anchor does not stop the storm, which continues to rage mercilessly at times. But it establishes a place of safety for you when it is planted in the firm ground of God's promise, supported by the oath of Jesus' cross. Anchored, as it were, by that very cross of Christ, the faithfulness of God will always attach itself to you through this Man of the cross, into whose name you have been baptized. The Anchor cross assures you that when the winds of adversity blow most strongly against you, you are safe in the loving care of Him whose Son gives you security even in the jaws of death!

And the Anchor cross does something else for you, too. It points you to the certainty of the harbor that lies beyond your sight. Even when you travel with favorable winds, the Anchor cross still lies there in the boat of your life, assuring you that the journey has an end, a harbor toward which you are moving. It assures us that the tempestuous sea is not endless and that the Land of Promise lies beyond the horizon. This is important on your journey, for hope is not only a way to stabilize life when the winds are against you. It's also a way

of having a vision, a way of seeing through and beyond what is presently visible. It raises your eyes to see with eyes of faith a place to which you journey—a goal for your wandering. Thus, it helps to mold your life even while you are still traveling, that when you conclude the journey, the Father will greet you, for His child will then have safely arrived in the final harbor.

Dear Friends in Christ, if you know this, if you live by this hope, this confidence, this certainty, you will be both encouraged in your journey and stabilized in the storms of life because there is One who stands at the end of the journey waiting for you with open arms. If you have a vision like that, you will find the journey worthwhile and will, even before the harbor is in sight, be filled with joy, conforming and configuring your life in anticipation of your homecoming. In Christ you throw out your anchor, grasping firmly your heavenly home. Amen.