

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1-4
Message: Where It All Comes Together
September 9, 2018; Bethel CRC, Brockville, ON
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You've seen it happen. You've taken the pictures. You've told the stories.

A birthday or Christmas present is given to a very young child. The present is wrapped in colourful paper. The child is mesmerized by the sparkles or the pictures on the wrapping paper. "Come on, open it!" And someone tears a corner to give the child the idea of what to do. Eventually the paper gets ripped and pulled and taken off of the package and the promised gift appears. The child looks at the actual gift, and then turns and picks up the *gift wrap* to look at it some more and play with the colourful designs. The actual gift is virtually ignored.

That's one way to describe the theme of the book of Hebrews. The glorious gift of Jesus has been revealed, but some of those who have known Jesus and believed in him are tempted to spend more time looking at the gift wrap. This book is written to Jewish Christians. While they have come to believe in Jesus, they are facing ridicule from non-believing Jews or persecution from others and they are wondering if the old way of laws and sacrifices was still the better way.

It's the temptation we so easily face, especially for those who have grown up in the Christian faith. Remember the days when the church was full and we had two services? Remember the days when we read the law every Sunday? Remember when we had so many more young families spread through the church and a full Sunday School? So much has changed and has it been for the better? Maybe we should go back to doing things the way it used to be done.

We can focus so much attention on the wrappings. It's about doing worship right and making sure we include the right things in the right place in the order of worship. It's about doing the Lord's Supper right, serving the right things in the right way in the right atmosphere.

It's about doing church right, behaving in the right way and believing the right things and keeping the right doctrines. So much has changed. Maybe we should go back to what it was like. Maybe we've let go of too much.

The author of this book of Hebrews is not denying the value and importance of the past. He reminds his Jewish- Christian readers that God spoke to their forefathers at many times and in various ways. The word translated "many times" means literally "many parts." Fragments. In bits and pieces. Throughout the Old Testament, God revealed many glimpses

of truth. Being glimpses, the revelation was incomplete. God's people rejoiced in the fragments. They trusted God in how they understood their relationship with him. These fragments hinted at, pointed to something that was to come. But they were not the whole picture.

This is not to say that the past was unimportant. What happened in the past helps us to understand the present and look ahead to the future. It was God who spoke in the past in a variety of ways. When God speaks, it's important to listen. Although the "many times and in various ways" are not specifically listed, we can look at the Old Testament and be able to quickly fill in the details.

God spoke through visions, angelic revelations, prophetic events and words, thunder and lightning from the mountain, miracles of parting water. God spoke to Adam, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Micah, and many others. The prophets were all those called by God and filled with his Spirit to speak and record the word as a progressive revelation that hinted, implied, pointed to the coming of Christ.

And when Jesus finally came, he brought the very Word of God because he *is* the Word of God. Therefore, Jesus brought that Word in all its fullness, richness. He was the final revelation. In Jesus is where it all comes together.

The absolute sufficiency of Jesus is demonstrated in this dazzling display of descriptive phrases in verses 2 and 3. There are seven ways mentioned in which Jesus is better than anything or anyone that might claim our religious allegiance. In the Old Testament, seven was a divine number of completeness. Writing to a Jewish Christian audience, listing seven ways here is not a coincidence.

From vv. 2-3: "whom [God] appointed the heir of all things (all things belong to him), through whom he made the universe (in the beginning was the Word, through whom all was made),

the radiance of God's glory (as the rays express the glory of the sun),

the exact representation of being (like a signet ring in wax, exact image),

sustaining all things by his powerful word (continues to care),

provided purification for sins (died on the cross to pay for sin),

sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven." (rose and ascended, bringing us back to the beginning of these seven characteristics, saying he is in control of all things.)

In Jesus is where it all comes together. All of what God has been speaking and

revealing makes sense in the person and work of Jesus. All of what God is doing in creating, saving, restoring, renewing, sustaining all of creation comes together in the person of Jesus. All of what God is doing in our lives to draw us to him, to forgive our sins, to give us purpose for living, to give us hope for today and forever comes together in the person of Jesus.

Unfortunately, we don't always see it that way. It doesn't really seem like Jesus is in control. We wonder if our sins are really be forgiven. Grace seems too easy. There must be something more we have to do. The excitement of faith that we used to have isn't there. We're not growing in our relationship with God. The songs don't inspire us. It's hard to pray. We wonder if it's really worth it, or if all this stuff is even true.

That's when we might choose to bolster our faith by looking back at the old ways. Or we bolster our faith by adding something, some particular religious practice, to show that we're at least doing something. Eugene Peterson, in his introductory comments to the letter to the Hebrews, calls it "hyphen faith" or "Jesus-and" faith. "In the letter, it is Jesus-and-angels, or Jesus-and-Moses, or Jesus-and-priesthood. In our time it is more likely to be Jesus-and-politics, or Jesus-and-education, or Jesus-and-religion, or even Jesus-and-Buddha. This letter deletes the hyphens, the add-ons. The focus becomes clear and sharp again: it's about God's action in Jesus. And we are free once more for the act of faith, the one human action in which we don't get *in* the way but *on* the Way.

This letter is written to people who have somehow missed the way to maturity and are stumbling. It was written to help us put our fragments of faith in Jesus all together in to a fully satisfying whole. It helps to move us out to *experience* the fullness of this complete salvation. In Jesus, all the fragments of truth about God come together to give us the whole truth. In Jesus, the fragments of our lives come together to give us wholeness and maturity as persons."

It all comes together in Jesus. The main and central action is everywhere and always what God has done, is doing, and will do for us. Jesus is the revelation of that action. Our main and central task is to live in responsive obedience to God's action revealed in Jesus. Our part in the action is the act of faith.

We believe and live and give thanks. We don't have to add to it. We don't have to focus on the packaging, when we have the gift of life, the gift of God, the fulfilment of the story in Jesus. We don't have to focus on the past and the way it was done. Renewal of faith is through a focus on Jesus, applied to how we live out our faith.

How do we focus on Jesus? Read the Word, the story of God in the Bible. Read it to

see how all the parts point to Jesus. Will you commit to reading the Bible for 5 minutes more per day that you already do now? Or imagine what might happen if you spent as much time reading the Bible as you spend on Facebook, or watching the news, or reading the paper?

Be careful not to read the Bible in fragments, finding a proof text here and there. We must read the Bible as a whole to get the whole picture. We must read of the reason for why God had to send his only Son. We may wish to pass over the discouraging story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. But that helps us understand the cross and empty grave. Jesus is our Saviour from sin. We read the Bible to understand the fragments preparing and pointing to the coming of Jesus. Reading the stories and prophecies, we can better understand what God was intending in the things he had Jesus say and do.

What we have in the Bible, and in Jesus Christ, is the truth, where it all comes together. We do not have to add something else to come to help us better understand what God is doing in our lives or in the world. We have the perfect and full revelation. It is complete in Jesus.

Consider the practice of Lord's Supper. Take the sacrament, not as something we add on once in a while, but as the reminder of the story and the nourishment of our faith. Focus on Jesus, not the size of the bread or how full the cup is. Focus on the gift of love shown in Jesus that assures you that you are a child of God.

Listen for, pay attention to the ways that God is speaking. In our kids program in Brockville we talk about "God sightings." Where have you seen God at work: in a sunrise or the song of the birds, in a word from a friend, in a kind deed to others. Listen to God speaking to you, reminding you that you are a child of God through Jesus.

In Jesus it all comes together. We don't have to look for more or add to it. God spoke in the past, pointing to Jesus. Look to Jesus and realize the richness of what God has done for you. Daily realize and celebrate what God continues to do for you. Thanks be to God!

Amen.