

A wife watched her husband through the week begin to drain in energy. And by the end of the week, he had simply lost the desire to get up and get with the day. She heard the alarm go off through the door. She listened as nine minutes passed and the alarm went off again. Apparently, he just kept punching the little snooze button on the top. Finally, after three or four extra rings she walked in and said, Babe, it's time to get up. He peeked out from under the covers and asked, can you give me three good reasons to get up? She said, "Well, yes. First of all, it's Sunday, and you need to get dressed for church. Second, you are 46 years old, and you know better. Third, you are the pastor of the church to be there!"

Today, I would like to talk about reasons to come to the church. Let me ask you, Do you have a good reason to explain why you are here?

Hebrews 10:19 says, Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have the confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. (NIV)

I need to remind each of you that in the Old Testament if anyone came into the Most Holy Place in the temple or touched the Ark of the Covenant, they died. Even if it was accidental, like when the Ark of the Covenant was being taken to Jerusalem, it didn't matter. The Ark of the Covenant, which was placed in the Most Holy Place represented the presence of God, and no one could enter into God's presence.

However, the writer of Hebrew reminds us what Christ did for us, dying on the cross, rising on the third day, and then ascending into heaven many days later. He tells us that Jesus is the great priest, the one who offered not just a sacrifice of lambs, or dove, but offered his own body as a sacrifice for sin. Moreover, he did not do this over and over again as the priest in the temple did, but he sacrificed himself just once for the sins of all generations.

Jesus sacrificed himself because almighty God needed a sacrifice for our sins, the sins of humankind. God is a just God and a forgiving God, but at the same time a righteous God who wants a holy sacrifice for sin. So the writer of Hebrews is reminding us that Jesus sacrificed himself for all sinners, sinners in the past as well as sinner now and in the future.

George Buttrick wrote a book called *Jesus Came Preaching*. He describes a picture he once saw in an Italian church. It is a picture of the crucifixion of Christ. As you look at it closely you notice a large and shadowy figure behind the figure of Jesus. The shadowy figure is God so that the nail that pierces the hand of Christ also pierces the hand of God, and the spear that pierces the side of Christ also pierces the side of God. The picture makes the point that God was in Christ reconciling Himself to the world. The crucifixion does not represent God against Jesus the human, but God incarnates taking upon Himself the sin of the world.”

As the great high priest, Jesus made the sacrifice upon the altar of righteousness for our sins. For your sins and my sins. When he did, our sins were forgiven, and they are forgotten. We can go boldly, with confidence, into the presence of God through the blood of Jesus. We can enter the Most Holy Place, the Sanctuary to experience God’s love and forgiveness. A place where we can be loved and accepted for who we are and grow into what we were meant to be. We are a blessed people who come to the Most High Place, the Sanctuary.

1 John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

When we come into the presence of God, we have opportunities to begin anew and afresh because we start not with just who we are and what we are, but who God is and what He has done and what He promised He will do.

Do you need a new beginning this morning? You will not find it at work or in society in general. The only place where we are actually invited to come and start our life over is in and through the church. It is here that God is continually reshaping us and making us into His people. We are rough along the edges. However, what other power or authority on earth is vested with the purpose of allowing us to start over, to begin again! In John 3 Nicodemus is told by Jesus, “you must be born again.” And Nicodemus responds, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Nicodemus asked Jesus, how do I begin again? How do I transform my life?

What the world throws away and discards, God loves and accepts and calls people who want to start over!

Two teenagers with a long history of crime and misbehavior robbed a YMCA on the lowest East Side of New York City. On the way out they saw a young man at the telephone switchboard. They were frightened and assumed that the man must be calling the police. They held and beat him violently with brass knuckles and a blackjack. They thought he was dead; they hid him behind the swimming pool and escaped.

Later that evening, a woman who came to swim was walking by the pool. She slipped in the man’s blood, screamed, and then found Donald Tippet’s body. He lived, but one eye was so severely damaged that it could not be saved.

Meanwhile, the two teenagers were seized and brought to trial. Their past records assured that both would get long sentences. Donald Tippet did an amazing thing when he called for that the judge allows the two young men to be paroled to his charge. He wanted to give them another chance. He believed they could change.

One of the boys committed another crime, was caught, and sent to jail. The other boy was receptive to Tippet's kindness. He went to college and then to medical school. He became one of our nation's leading eye surgeons. A reporter, writing about Donald Tippet's amazing story of forgiveness, said of the surgeon's deeds: "I wonder if he ever performs one of those delicate eye operations without thinking of that night in the YMCA and the young man whose forgiveness changed his life!"

Do you want a new life today? Do you need to start over? You can! No matter where are or what you have done, Jesus calls us to a place to start over and gives us opportunities to begin again.

Hebrews 10:22 says, "let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water."

In the ministry and teachings of the church, we come to be all that God has called us to be. The church is the living body of Jesus in this world; it is holy and honorable. It is holy because it believes in Jesus and has the Holy Spirit. In the church, we give ourselves to others, and they give of themselves to us. We learn from each other, grow with each other and are stretched in faith together.

Three good men once asked a preacher; "Do you think a man could get to heaven without joining the church?" "I think he could," replied the preacher. They laughed, patted him on the back, and called him broadminded. "Let me ask you a question, and I want you to answer me just as quickly as I answered you;" said the preacher. "Why do you want to go to heaven that way?" The men were speechless. "Why don't you ask me another question?" suggested the preacher. "Why don't you ask me if a man could get to England without going on a ship?" "Well," they said, "we will ask you that. Now, what is your answer?" I see no reason why a man could not

get to England without going on a ship, provided he was a good swimmer, tied some food between his shoulders to eat on the way, had the strength to buffet all the waves – if a shark did not get him first. And suppose he did get to England without a ship, do you think he would get there much ahead of the man who goes by ship? And would he be any better off than those who had the fellowship of others and went by ship?”

A church does not save us. Jesus saves, but then you don't need a grocery store to find food either, but it is sure that it is much easier if you use one.

I believe that the church is the place where we teach God. The church is still the best place to find good and honorable things about people. Right now, this very moment you are teaching your children, grandchildren some precious lessons about life that will benefit them for eternity. Your very presence here this morning says volumes about what you believe and for what you hope.

I believe in the church because Jesus died for it and one day He's coming back for it. He left the church behind as an extension of who He was in this world.

Jesus is a Great Priest in His church. Here we find His love and acceptance. Do you need Jesus this morning in some area of your life? Do you need a healing touch of Jesus Christ? You will find Him in church. He meets us here. You can meet Him if you want. He is waiting for you.