

Grace and peace from God our Father and all joy to you in the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. (2 Timothy 1:2,9,10) Amen.

Hebrews 3:1–6 (NKJV) — 1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. 3 For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. 4 For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. 5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

This is the word of the Lord.

Pray: Lord, let us not harden our hearts, but hear and receive the rest which has been sent to us through Your Son, Christ Jesus. Amen.

A Faith Building Project in Jesus

1. Built and paid for by the Apostle and High Priest of our confession
2. Resting firmly on the Apostle and High Priest of our confession
... confident to the end.

In Jesus name, who is, who was, and who is to come, our Savior in flesh and in glory, dear holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling,

We are now more than seven years removed from the building of this church. Yet I am sure you can recall that this building did not appear out of thin air. Taking a brief glimpse at your past bulletins, I came accross over a year of announcements about ongoing meetings and labor that was poured into this project. Likewise, careful planning went into securing the right financing so this project could be completed. And here we are with a sturdy structure that we expect to last for years to come.

Your faith is only as strong as those essential elements: the right builder, the right financing, and the right foundation. How many years are we removed from the building project that has come to us in Christ Jesus? How many more years can we expect this structure to last? **As “partakers of a heavenly calling” have been made part of a building project that is built, paid for, and resting in Jesus.**

1. Built and paid for by the Apostle and High Priest of our confession

In most large building projects the client will contract the work out rather than trying to do it all himself. The design is usually contracted to an architect; the labor is contracted

to different companies with the right experience and the right tools; and the financing is contracted to the bank.

1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus,

When we call Jesus the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, we are saying that He does it all. He has been contracted by God to design, build, and pay for the building project of our faith.

Those two titles give us much confidence in where we stand. The title "Apostle" means "one who is sent." The twelve apostles are called so because they were "sent" by Jesus. On a much higher scale, Jesus is the Great Apostle, because He was sent by the Father. He was contracted by God to bring us the design of salvation. *For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.*" (John 12:49–50) Jesus is the Apostle who has been sent with a heavenly design for eternal life.

He is also the High Priest of our confession. In the Old Testament, the High Priest was the only person in all of Israel who was allowed to go behind the veil in the Temple. That veil signified a separation between sinful human beings and the holiness of God. Only the High Priest, once a year, could enter this holy space to meet with God. The High Priest was the spiritual "go-between" for God and the people.

In our OT reading we read that the Lord knew Moses face to face. Moses was a "go-between" for the people and God. As we read, He was faithful in all for which God had appointed Him. And God had appointed Him to bring the design known as the Old Covenant.

So many of those 1st century controversies were over this very subject. Like Peter, many wanted to worship Moses and Jesus together. To have salvation offered freely to anyone who believes just seems too simply. So many false teachers arose claiming that faith in Jesus was only part of your salvation, must also become a Jew and keep the Old Covenant Law. It is so difficult for us to cling to the fact that the way we live our life plays no part in who is saved and who is not.

You may have noticed in the bulletin a few weeks ago that in the course of the last two years we have paid off about 163,000 of our loan on ILC Academic Center. While that is a lot of money, it is actually only about 9% of what we owe. When looking at our own mortgage here at Ascension, the numbers can sometimes make us feel overwhelmed. And perhaps you feel the same when considering similar debts in your personal life. Does the Church rest in uncertainty? Is the building of God's house something that is still being "paid off?"

To rely on ourselves, our offerings, our membership numbers as the basis for the building of God's house, is to be left under a contract that can never be met. When we think our redemption is something that we're still making payments on, leaves us under a MOSES-JESUS salvation, and brings us under the burden of the LAW. Under that Law, our debt grows greater and greater each day ... For instance, at work, when I hear others talking about sinful behavior, do I go along with it? ... when someone begins talking bad about the boss, do I laugh? ... when someone bears false witness against their spouse, do I join right in? ... when someone starts speaking badly about Jesus, do I grow silent? And at the end of the day, do I go home thinking, "boy, I'm glad I'm not like those guys at work – they don't even go to church?" On the one hand we claim to rely on Jesus, but actually we begin trusting in our being "better" than other churches, other Christians, other non-Christians as the basis for God's salvation. Built on this, the church cannot stand. A confession offers only part of Jesus and leaves the rest to us, will eventually crumble.

On that mountain, God declares, "This is my beloved Son, Hear Him!" The debt cannot be carried by us. The fulfillment of Moses, Elijah, and all the OT is Jesus, the Apostle sent from heaven to pay our debt.

The Transfiguration shows us the High Priest of our confession. Jesus is the only One to truly enter the fullness of God's holiness behind the veil. On that Mount we see that heavenly glory of God's Son has appeared to us in human flesh. Just a few verses before our text we read, *Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.* (Hebrews 2:17)

That word: "propitiation" indicates a payment being made. God doesn't just forgive sin by wishing it away, winking, or granting a pardon. He demands payment – up front, in full. This is what makes Jesus so much more glorious than Moses. Moses offered only the shadows of Christ.

Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:12)

As High Priest, Jesus entered the Holiest of All, behind the veil we could never cross on our own. With His own blood He has drawn near God's holy place in our behalf and obtained for us eternal redemption. Jesus, designed, built, and paid for the house in which we dwell by faith. Our faith and confession is truly built in, on and by Jesus.

2. Resting firmly on the Apostle and High Priest of our confession – confident to the end.

I am sure you can recall coming across some product you have bought or some element of your own house where the parts just don't quite work correctly, where the pieces just don't fit together right. When I used to work at a local appliance sales store in Eau Claire we used to have a word for these type of haphazard projects. We called it a "cobble-job." It is like a cobbler who has to design a shoe from various parts and try to assemble them together, but they just don't quite fit right.

We live in a world full of man's "cobble-jobs" – a world full of our own cobbles. We live in a world where supposed truth has become pieced together from man's various spare parts. Research done by the Pew Forum has divided Christianity into 35 different affiliation categories – not to mention the countless denominations and non-denominations within those categories. By dividing Christianity so severely and so broadly, the devil has succeeded in mixing the cobbles of man with the pure and reliable truth of Christ. So he has weakened the foundation upon which many Christians stand.

The devil has only one goal: to lure souls away from Jesus and the grace of God which saves. And so he will be satisfied with just one division to begin with. He is satisfied for a time to get just one lie into our midst. He is satisfied with weakening that foundation just a little so that somewhere down the line, as the lie grows and eats away, a generation to come will eventually topple.

With so many different churches and voices claiming to speak for the Divine Architect, which design can we rest upon?

5 And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, 6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Moses was faithful as a servant of the Old Covenant and part of the house of God. He delivered from God a design for the earthly temple. Jesus, however, is faithful as Son over the house. He has designed and build not just symbols or a testament to come – but a truly heavenly dwelling place. v.1 - you share in a "heavenly calling." So when you see that word "house" in our text, think: a spiritual dwelling place for God. As Paul testified in Ephesians, *[you are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20–22)*

The words we use to confess what we believe, the teachings we teach, the life we live do matter. These are the basis for God dwelling among us. These are the foundation upon which the Church rests. So don't think of the Lutheran confessions as merely tradition. Our faith should not be built upon on any earthly design at all. Confessional

documents like these Book of Concord from the 16th century or the Brief Statement from 1932 or Concerning Church Fellowship from 1961 must be more than symbols of our heritage. We confess these because they confess Jesus. We confess these because they state clearly those truths which have been delivered to us directly from the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

Here on earth we hear all kinds of voices, all kinds of plans and ideas for church growth – the style or personality of a pastor, the size of a church, whether our church has a youth group, a ladies group, or a mens group. We are partakers of a heavenly calling. The growth of the Church does not rely on any earthly thing; it is not physical, emotional, or statistical at all. The Church rests firmly on the heavenly presence of Christ – our confidence is built on Word and Sacrament. There is no other reliable foundation for a family, for a marriage, for a congregation. Only Christ and His word will endure to the end.

And having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, (Hebrews 10:21–24)

God's house is no cobble-job. It is a sturdy structure. In 1 Timothy it is called "the pillar and ground of truth." So in the midst of you own doubts – as you see sin invade and damage your life, as you wonder about where you life is headed – find rest in something reliable, something firm to the end.

As you think back to the past seven years and remember the labor that went into this building project, as you think about the payments still ahead, think not in terms of earthly things. Remember that this is a heavenly calling. God will preserve His house to the end. Cling firmly to the Apostle who was sent to take away your sins and fulfill all righteousness for you. Hold fast the High Priest who mediates heaven and earth, who represents you before God, and has offered the full debt payment for your sins by His blood. Rest firmly on this eternally reliable confession which has come to us by God's grace and remains among us in His Word. Holy brethren ... Hear Him. Amen.