

Draw Near With a True Heart

Open Door – 1 March 2026

Hebrews 10:19–25 & Mark 15:37–39

There is a phrase that has been quietly guiding us through these weeks as we've explored the book of Hebrews. It sits behind everything the letter says, everything it urges, everything it hopes for: ***fix your eyes on Jesus.***

Not fix your eyes on your fears, nor on your doubts, nor on the fluctuating story of how well you think you are managing faith at any given moment, but fix your eyes on Jesus. Hebrews is remarkably consistent about this. It does not attempt to stiffen resolve through pressure. It does not scold tired believers back into enthusiasm. Instead, it keeps re-presenting Christ - who He is, what He has done, how He stands toward us now.

If you can recall Kathryn's opening talk - Hebrews is not written to spiritual athletes, it is written to weary people. To those who are drifting not because they have rejected God, but because life is heavy, energy is thin, confidence is fragile. The danger the letter addresses is not rebellion so much as erosion. Not defiance, but discouragement. Which makes it feel, at times, less like an ancient sermon and more like an uncannily perceptive pastoral companion.

Across these weeks we have heard the letter describe Jesus in ways that steadily reshape the imagination. He is not distant, not aloof, not waiting impatiently at the end of our improvement project. He is presented as present, compassionate, faithful - a high priest who does not stand above human frailty but enters it, shares it, carries it. A priest who understands weakness from the inside. A priest who intercedes, who holds open the way to God, who accompanies rather than appraises.

Today we reach one of the great invitation passages of the letter. Having unfolded its rich vision of Christ's priesthood, Hebrews turns gently but unmistakably toward us: "Therefore... draw near with a true heart." It is difficult to overstate how radical that "therefore" is. It signals that what follows is not a new demand but a consequence.

Because of who Jesus is – our eternal High Priest!

Because of what Jesus has done – mediates the intimate relationship with God.

Because the conditions of access to God have been changed.

Hebrews speaks of confidence - confidence to enter the sanctuary, confidence to approach God.

Confidence is not a word most people instinctively associate with their inner spiritual life. Many live instead with a quiet hesitation: Am I welcome? Am I acceptable? Am I enough? There is often, beneath the surface, a subtle sense that nearness to God must be earned, or at least carefully managed, yet Hebrews speaks with clarity. We have confidence not because we are impressive, nor because our faith is untroubled, but because we have “a great priest over the house of God.” The emphasis falls not on our state, but on Christ’s.

This is where Mark’s Gospel enters. At the moment of Jesus’ death, Mark tells us, the curtain of the temple was torn in two. That curtain was no decorative furnishing, it symbolised the deepest boundary in Israel’s religious imagination - the separation between the Holy of Holies and everything beyond it, between the concentrated presence of God and the ordinary human world. It spoke of distance, of reverence, of the danger and mystery of divine holiness: And at the instant Christ breathes his last, it tears. Not slowly drawn aside, not cautiously opened, but torn.

Hebrews interprets this surprisingly: “through the curtain - that is, his flesh.” In Christ’s self-giving, the barrier is not merely crossed but rendered obsolete. The direction of movement is essential. Humanity does not storm heaven; God comes fully toward humanity. The tearing of the curtain is not an image of human achievement but of divine initiative. It is God’s refusal to remain remote.

Against that backdrop, the invitation “draw near” becomes something other than religious advice. It becomes permission grounded in grace.

But read carefully: Hebrews adds a phrase of extraordinary pastoral sensitivity: “with a true heart.” Not a perfect heart. Not an unwavering heart. Not a heart free from anxiety, distraction, doubt, or fatigue. A true heart. An honest one. The heart you actually possess, rather than the one you imagine you ought to have brought.

There is deep kindness here. God does not require polish. God does not wait for internal conditions to stabilise. God welcomes truth. The anxious heart, the grieving heart, the restless heart, the hopeful-but-tired heart - these are not obstacles to divine encounter, but the very realities Christ's priesthood is oriented toward.

Hebrews has already insisted that this priest is able to sympathise with weakness. Now it quietly affirms that honesty, not performance, is the proper posture of approach.

But the passage does not leave us there. Almost immediately, the language shifts from the singular to the communal. "Let us draw near... let us hold fast... let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds."

Faith, Hebrews insists, is sustained in relationship. Isolation is not heroism; it is vulnerability. The letter recognises a perennial human temptation: when energy is low or confidence shaken, withdrawal feels easier than presence. Yet neglecting to meet together, Hebrews warns, is not spiritually neutral. Something vital happens when believers remain connected - encouragement circulates, hope is reinforced, perspective is restored.

This brings us back, rather beautifully, to those slips still pinned in this church. Weeks ago, you wrote words of encouragement. They remain here as a visible testimony to who you already are to one another. Read them again and you will hear not random sentiment, but lived theology.

"God loves you."

"Be still and know that I am God."

"Peace, Joy, Love."

"When dark times seem overwhelming, reach out to God."

These are not decorative phrases. They are Hebrews written in handwriting rather than print. They are the congregation - you - embodying the letter's call: encourage one another.

And perhaps that is something we need to notice afresh. Hebrews is not urging us toward an unfamiliar practice. It is naming and strengthening something already alive among us. Encouragement is not an optional extra in Christian community, it is a means of grace.

It is how faith is protected from hardening, how hope is held when circumstances wobble, how individuals are quietly sustained by the presence and words of others.

All of which returns us to that guiding vision. 'Fix your eyes on Jesus.'

Churches can easily become preoccupied with many other focal points, but Hebrews repeatedly redirects attention. 'Look again at Christ.' At the priest who welcomes rather than excludes, who intercedes rather than judges, who understands rather than stands apart, who opens the way rather than guards it.

In Lent especially, this matters. Lent is often misheard as a season of spiritual strain, as though God were asking for intensified effort. But Hebrews frames the journey differently. The movement is not first from us toward God, but from God toward us. The curtain is torn. The way is open. The priest is compassionate.

Therefore, draw near - not by pretending strength, but by offering truth.

And so we pause. Not to analyse or fix, but simply to attend. What does your true heart carry today? Where has faith begun to feel like distance rather than nearness? Where might Christ already be closer than you have dared to trust? Silence, too, can be a form of drawing near.

Hebrews leaves us with a few quiet invitations that I want to leave with you:

- Draw near with honesty.
- Hold fast to hope.
- Encourage one another.
- And above all, fix your eyes on Jesus.

And as we hold fast together, we remember something Hebrews will soon remind us again - we are not the only ones who have ever felt weary, or uncertain, or in need of encouragement.

There is a whole story of faith behind us. A great cloud of witnesses - ordinary people who trusted God over time, sometimes bravely, sometimes falteringly. Next week we will glimpse that larger company. But for now, know this: when you draw near, you do not draw near alone.

Amen.