

Sunday: August 29, 2010

Scripture: Psalm 81:1,10-16
Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16
Luke 14:1,7-14

Sermon: "A Few Last Words!"

Call to Worship:

Sing aloud to God our strength:

Shout for joy to the God of Jacob!

 Raise a song; sound the tambourine,

 The sweet lyre with the harp.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon

At the full moon, on our feast day.

 In distress you called, and I delivered you

 I answered you in the secret place of thunder;

 I tested you at the waters of Meribah.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out

Of the land of Egypt.

Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

 Oh that my people would listen to me,

 That Israel would walk in my ways!

Sing aloud to God our strength:

Shout for joy to the God of Jacob!

 Raise a song; sound the tambourine,

 The sweet lyre with the harp.

 Blow the trumpet at the new moon.

Hymns: #122 Thine Is The Glory
 #389 (Tune) Words by Robert Button (see below)
 #539 Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise

In Love, Continue based on Hebrews 13:1-15

O Jesus, you have called us to share the love and grace,
Which we received abundant, shed down upon this place.
We cannot claim to love thee, and turn away unmoved
When strangers come and hungry, our apathy reprove.

Dear Lord, teach us to love all, like brother, sister, friend;
Empower us to touch lives, of all whom thou doest send.
For those who dwell in prisons, of spirit, mind and soul,
Will never know your power, lest we your love extol

Remind us, Lord, of servants, who paved the way of faith
Let our lives be a reflection, of how they ran the race
Remind us as we struggle, to set priorities.
And live as your reflection, our praise of you to please.

Prayer of Confession:

God of all creation. Hear our supplications and grant to us forgiveness for opportunities we have missed to share your love. We live at such a mad rush. We hustle from one place to the next as if the world depended upon us, and our sense of importance is blown out of proportion. Lord, if you were like us, none of our prayers would be answered and our cries for forgiveness would fall on deaf ears. But you are not like us. We are created in your image. We would make you in our image! Forgive our egocentric mindset and empower us to step aside from our sinful natures and see the world as you see it: a world of love and beauty where praise of you is a thing of joy. We pray in the name of Christ, in whose image we strive to live. Amen.

Sunday: August 29, 2010

Scripture: Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16
Luke 14:1,7-14

Sermon: "A Few Last Words!"

Well, "a few last words" ! I know what you are thinking.

"Preacher Bob's going to let us have it!"

"I hope he's not too hard on us!"

"What in the world is he going to lay on us?"

And a few of you may be thinking: "A Few Last Words." I hope they aren't the last words we ever hear from Bob. Perhaps some day he will come back and preach again for us.

But very likely, most of you are thinking: "Oh yeah, A FEW LAST WORDS! When ever did pastor Bob confine himself to a FEW words.

Well, you know. Ever since the PNC came in with notice that they had a candidate for the pulpit, and I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that my service would end with this Sunday, my mind has been mulling over what I could possibly say on my last Sunday as your minister.

Would I try to sum up the last two years, hitting all the high spots and all the joys that we have experienced together?

Could I make a list of the important areas of Altavista's life that might need some work and extra effort?

It dawned on me that to do that would be rather presumptuous of me. And then I read the Lectionary passages for this Sunday. Hebrews 13 jumped out at me and I knew right away the message that God would have me share on my last Sunday with you. It is a message that comes to us straight from the pages of scripture. It is a message that comes at the end of a letter that is packed with great theology and practical implications for a life of faith. You might even say that the 13th chapter is the "A Few Last Words" from an author who wanted, more than anything else to encourage the readers to maintain the Faith. So, here goes: "A Few Last Words" straight from scripture and from someone who lived the life of faith in a world that was hostile to this new belief.

Chapter 13 begins: "Let brotherly love continue."

Everything else in this chapter hinges on this admonition. So, we shall spend some time in detail on it. It is only four words long. Every single word is essential for the effect which the author of the letter intends. We cannot leave out a single word and arrive at the power and force which it contains.

LET.... The injunction is that you “allow” something to exist, something to happen. This word “let” speaks to the fact that as a follower of Jesus Christ you have the power and the authority to empower something very vital in the life of faith. The unspoken word here is “you”. Not someone else. Not your neighbor. Not the other person. You.

Under some situations, the word LET means, stand back and allow something to happen that is going to happen anyhow. Don’t try to stop that child from touching the hot burner on the stove. Let it happen! He’ll learn a lesson he will never forget. Don’t be a player in the process. Just let it be. And we are reminded of the thousands of German Christians who stood back and LET Hitler’s regiem imprison millions of Jews and exterminate them.

But the Greek word used in this case is an active form of the word. LET it happen, do not be a bystander. Become involved in the process. Allow it to happen by your active participation in the process. Which brings us to the next two words.

Brotherly Love. Let’s deal with the “Love” word first. Interesting isn’t it that the Greek language has three separate words which we translate as LOVE in English. Eros, from which we get erotic. The kind of passionate love that exists between a man and a woman. A kind of love that is, in many ways, self directed. Self focused. It reeks of personal pleasure.

Philios, from which we get philanthropic. A love that shows concern, but very little personal involvement. In ways, a kind of detached concern by which one can stand off at a distance and watch what happens.

And thirdly, Agape. We really have no English equivalent. But the Agape form of Love is sacrificial love.... Other directed love.... A love that is focused on the welfare of someone or some group of persons other than one’s self. It is a giving kind of love, not a taking.

And to further define this kind of love, the author modifies it with Brotherly. Now, Brotherly does not mean masculine. This word is filled with all kinds of caring and sharing that cannot really be covered by any other word, and it reminds us of the response of Cain when God sought him out in the garden and asked him where his brother Able was. “Am I by brother’s keeper?” asks Cain. And we all know the answer to that question. No, we are not our brother’s keeper! We are our brother’s brother. Or our brother’s sister, or our sister’s sister, and that entails a whole plethora of human emotions and responsibilities that go far beyond being a “keeper”. Like we are a “keeper” in a zoo.

Brotherly Love.... Sisterly Love implies a set of relationships. LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE. Let the relationships that emanate from being members of the

same family, with all the intimate concern and care, that family members should have for each other. Let it continue. Remember that because you are a part of a family of Faith, you have a responsibility to love and care for each other, just as Christ loves and cares for you. Let that happen! You let it happen!

LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE. Wow! What is the author saying? He is saying that he has experienced something among the brothers and sisters that cannot be found anywhere else in the world of his day. Among the descendents of Abraham who have found new life in Jesus Christ there is a new spirit. The best he can do to define this spirit is to use the phrase Brotherly Love. It is there among the believers in Ephesus, it is there among the believers in Corinth, it is there among the believers in Jerusalem and Antioch, and Colosae.

The author is not suggesting some new twist on the Faith. No, it already exists. And his final words at the end of this letter are a plea to Let It Continue. Let this Brotherly Love which he has experienced as he moved from city to city, from catacomb to catacomb, from prison to prison, this almost indefinable love which is so powerful that it unites folks who come from different nations and different cultures, let it continue. Let this Brotherly Love continue to define who we are as a Church, as believers.

When the rest of the world steps back and looks at us and compares us with other groups, other organizations, other faith systems. What will be the defining difference? Will it not be the fact that because we are joined as a family through Christ, we live in a state of continuous Brotherly Love?

Some of us belong to other organizations that have close relationships between members. I am sure that if a member of the Lions Club needed help, his brothers would come to his assistance. And the same for the Masonic Lodge, and the Rotary Club and the Ruritan Club and the 4-H club.

But I want to tell you that the Brotherly love that I have experienced flowing throughout this congregation is something to behold. If the writer of Hebrews could come back and experience what I have experienced, he would write us a letter and close it off with these vary same words. LET BROTHERLY LOVE CONTINUE.

And then the author would follow up with the same line of thought that he followed in his first letter: "show hospitality to strangers... you never know when one of them is an angel from God" Read that: you never know when one of them is a messenger from God. And remember those in prison. Try to feel what they feel being locked up and confined to a cell. And we can add to this try to feel what folks feel when their spirits and their hearts are locked up in prison. There are more ways to be in prison in this world than to be locked up behind bars. And remember those who are ill treated in this life. Isn't that what Franny's House is all about? And isn't that what Lynchburg Home is all about. Remember, we have bodies just like the battered wives and the abused children, and it is only a hair's breath between folks who are mistreated and us. Then the author adds: Honor marriage. Marriage is lifted up because it is the basic building block

of society. Without marriage we would live in chaos. And then the author admonishes us to refrain from immorality and adultery. For God will judge these things. Well, of course God is going to judge each of us. The thing we need to remember is that we will be judged in light of the forgiveness and new life which was secured for us through Jesus Christ.

Notice that we are admonished to keep our lives free from the love of money, and to be content with what we have. Note that this admonition has the same strength as does the injunction about honoring marriage.

We could say a lot more about these things, but suffice it to say that all of these admonitions flow out of that one essential injunction: Let Brotherly Love Continue.

You do that and you don't have to worry about the rest of it. And remember that the key to being a loving and outreaching congregation lies in Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever.

It is through Christ that we offer up praise and sacrifice.

It is through Christ that we do acts of kindness and share the riches which we have received from The Creator.

And so, my friends, these are my last words as well: Let Brotherly Love Continue.

And may God Bless you all as you turn the page of a new chapter in the life of Altavista Presbyterian.

Amen.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.win2pdf.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.
This page will not be added after purchasing Win2PDF.