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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
September 22, 2019
15th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Proverbs 25:6-7, Luke 14:1,7-14
Hymns: 24; 439; 408; 412 (238:3-5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Hebrews 13:1-8

Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. ³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also.

⁴ Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

⁵ *Let your conduct be* without covetousness; *be* content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we may boldly say:

"The Lord *is* my helper;
I will not fear.

What can man do to me?"

⁷ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. ⁸ Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Relevance --

Many criticisms have been leveled at the church with regard to relevance. Many church bodies have adapted their teachings to meet what people of this world are asking of them. Of course relevance is in itself relative. It all depends on who you are and where you are coming from and what exactly you desire to have. If you want the world to be a certain way, and embrace certain values than you will change what you believe, teach, and confess, and how you propose to impact the world around you, all in an attempt to remain relevant.

Much of the visible church today has abandoned the foundation of faith that has been laid by the generations that have gone before us, declaring that most of what was previously taught doesn't conform to science and the norm of society today, as well as not meeting the needs that are plainly obvious to anyone and everyone who is looking at the world. There is so much poverty, so much violence, so much that has changed as people have become more open and understanding to different lifestyles. If the church is going to be relevant than we also must adapt to the advanced knowledge and values of our world today and embrace the world's manner of life.

Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever! (v.8) That simple statement of the Holy Spirit to the early Christians proclaims the absolute relevance of Jesus Christ for us today in the 21st century! What too much of the visible church has bought into is the deception of the world and the devil's propaganda, the devil's lies! The greatest need in the world today is still deliverance from death and the devil. People's greatest need remains the gospel of God's love and forgiveness and eternal salvation. This eternal salvation comes to a sinful mankind through the perfect righteousness, the sacrificial death, and the glorious physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the

dead. Hope is found in Christ **alone**. Peace with God is secured through faith in Jesus as our Redeemer Lord. Mankind's greatest need is met by the proclamation of this gospel of God's love and forgiveness in Christ Jesus. Jesus is relevant. **Jesus is relevance personified**. He is as true today as the day the first gospel promise was proclaimed to a fallen Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as relevant as when the angels proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds, as the day He offered up His life for us on Calvary. This gospel remains the power of God unto salvation to all who believe. (Romans 1:16)

What's more relevant than that? You might ask. Well, we need direction for daily life in this world. Jesus Christ is an ever-living presence in our hearts and lives. The writer to the Hebrew Christians directed them to a very relevant manner of living by reminding them of how --

THEME: Jesus Is a Constant for the Christian's Life Evident in -

I. Brotherly Love.

Hebrews 13:1-3 "Let brotherly love continue. ² Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. ³ Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also."

The apostle John wrote, "*We love Him because He first loved us.*" (1 John 4:19) We all fall under the wondrous grace of God as He sent His only begotten Son into the flesh. Jesus **is** the Son of God incarnate who came down to earth to bear our sin in His own body, and yes, He needed a body to do that for us. He needed a body to suffer and die for my sins and yours. This is the greatness of God's love. All this falls under the umbrella of the Greek word "agape." It is the pure love that reaches out, not dependent upon any response. So Christ has loved us, and God has reached out to us in His grace and called us to faith in Christ Jesus. In doing this He adopted us, and

included us in the family of God. We refer to our fellow believers as our brothers and sisters in Christ.

That is the wonder of God's love, and if that isn't relevant nothing is!

It impacts us in a very special way because we have been drawn into the communion of saints, the fellowship of saints. We are to love one another. Here we suddenly find a different word, a different concept other than the "Agape" love we see in the gospel. The word here is "philadelphia," yes just like the name of the city, but with real meaning. If Philadelphia is to be the city of brotherly love, we know that it is far from perfect in living up to that name, still it is quite a goal for which one might strive. Apart from the gospel renewing one's mind and heart such brotherly love is as far out of reach as the stars. But now by inspiration of the Holy Spirit we are encouraged to let brotherly love continue.

That exhortation begins with those fellow members of one's own congregation. This is all about the love of friendship. It doesn't mean that we have to go to ball games together, but I'm ready to go if you want to go, and I have done it a few times in the past with parishioners in other congregations. What it does mean is that we are kindly affectionate with one another. We see this in the friendly greetings that occur on Sunday mornings as people arrive for worship as well as the visiting following the service. However I am concerned that we are letting this blessing slip. There isn't the participation we once had in congregation picnics, or even at potluck meals. And then all too often I see family's sitting together and missing the opportunity to become better acquainted with other members. How can we engender brotherly love if we don't even bother to get to know one another? We need this. We need it all the more because we are a small congregation and the Holy Spirit is encouraging us to work on this brotherly love and make sure it continues. This is not just Pastor Barthels encouraging this growth of

brotherly love. This is the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the inspired Word of God encouraging us to work at getting to know one another and to build that loving relationship that is precious among Christian friends.

This doesn't stop with the members of the congregation. We are to love strangers as well. Again the Greek word used here is "phileo" the love of friendship. We may not entertain angels as the inspired writer suggests, but we may well be able to entertain fellow saints. You know this is another blessing of Christian fellowship when we have visitors in church, or the opportunity to have the tour choir come to our congregation or a pastoral conference. Are we ready to open our homes and welcome brothers and sisters in Christ that, yes, may be strangers, but are also fellow saints? Let brotherly love continue!

It becomes even more important as the church faces opposition from the world. People are suffering for the gospel's sake. We may experience some opposition from the world as we stand for the truth, but it seldom advances beyond some mild ridicule. We have brothers and sisters in Christ in Africa and India and Nepal who are assaulted, physically assaulted because they were studying the Bible, worshiping Jesus, or attempting to teach others more about the Lord their Redeemer. Not that long ago a group of pastors associated with us living in India were having a conference when it was invaded by a group of Hindus who severely beat the people attending the seminar, destroying any laptop computers they had, and stomping on their cell phones. There is no legal recourse for them to turn to. Their help is from the Lord and the encouragement of Christian brothers. So while our text says we are to remember the prisoners, it also says "those who are mistreated." We do well to remember those who are suffering for Jesus' name, for the sake of the gospel.

We ought to remember them in our prayers, and in the support and encouragement that we can show them by

sending visitors, by sending them aid and supplies to assist them in fulfilling the ministry they are determined to fulfill to the praise and glory of our Savior Jesus Christ. How blessed we are to have them as an example for us, for we have “*not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin!*” (Hebrews 12:4)

This is real, and it is before us. Are we ready to support with our love those whom God has called to be our brothers and sisters in Christ?

Jesus Is a Constant for the Christian’s Life Evident in -- II. Christian Virtue.

Hebrews 13:4-6 “Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

⁵ *Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* ⁶ So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

The fact that these verses sound out of step with our world demonstrates two things. The first thing is that there is a real need for these words to be heard in our society, and that they be carefully taught among our people and to our children. The second point is that there really is nothing new under the sun. We think that what we hear about in America today with the rejection of marital values, people choosing to live together as if they were married, having children, and at some later date for their own romantic reasons, choosing to be married, for a time, all on their own terms, is the new morality. That’s not new morality. It is very, very old immorality. The acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle, is nothing new. Giving it legal protection and making claims that this is how God made people is simply an expression of evil and the devil’s lies that date back to Old Testament days of Sodom and Gomorrah.

That covetousness is a driving force for much of man's behavior is also nothing new. We live in a time when even state governments encourage covetousness that they might take advantage of the poor and the desperate with state run lottery games, the kind of games that used to be called the numbers rackets run by organized crime. It's nothing new. People have coveted riches as long as sin has been around, and the corrupt human mind finds it far more reasonable to trust in riches than to trust in the Lord.

These were temptations that confronted the early Christians addressed in this epistle, and these were specifically Jewish Christians who had grown up with a thorough knowledge of the Ten Commandments and the holy will of God. Even with faith in Christ they were still drawn away by the lusts of the world and deceit of riches.

This encouragement to Christian virtue is as relevant today as it was when this epistle was written, and so important for us to take to heart. Why? Because it is all about Jesus. Is Jesus our Savior Lord? Of course He is! He is our ever present Redeemer. We confess His name before the world. When we live according to His will we bring **glory to His** name, the glory of our Lord! When we trust in Him, when we take His words of promise to heart that Jesus will never leave us or forsake us, but that He is and ever will be an ever present help in trouble, than we **glorify His name** before the world. My dear friends in Christ, that is why we are here, and have not already been taken up into heaven. And so the Apostle Paul also wrote to the Romans: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."* (Romans 12:1-2)

We show Christ before the world by our manner of life, a manner of life that reflects Christian virtues, and that will bring animosity from the world. We can do this because “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (v.8) **He is** our very present, ever faithful Redeemer Lord.

We are encouraged to preserve that truth among us by --

III. Following the Faithful

Hebrews 13:7-8 “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of *their* conduct. ⁸ Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

These words point to spiritual leaders who were faithful to the Word of God. These are the ones we are supposed to follow. Yes, this is reminding you that congregation pastors and officers are supposed “rule” over you, but only as they bring you the Word of God. Pastors are not to lord it over you as if they are better or more important. And then this encouragement is not limited to your current pastor and council. Indeed we do well to think back to those who have gone before us, to those who in trying times took a stand for the truth of God’s Word, even when it meant sacrifice, real sacrifice. They did this by the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. They walked the road of faith in this pilgrimage, keeping their eyes fixed on Jesus, keeping their eyes fixed on the goal. Many of these pastors and teachers and lay leaders that we ought to remember have already entered into their rest. We are to remember the outcome of their conduct, the crown of glory given to them by the Lord.

This exhortation is every bit as important for me in my role as pastor as it is for all of you as lay members of the congregation. The Lord has blessed me with role models of faith to emulate, role models who presented the Word of God faithfully and then lived according to the Word of God as the norm, the standard for faith and life. Pastors and elders of congregations, fathers and mothers in

Christian families, we are called upon by the Lord to serve that same function. We are to rule our homes and congregations and families with the truth of God's Word, setting an example of how to live not only according to the law of God, but the law of Christian love.

Jesus Christ is alive and well and an ever present force in our lives. He who has redeemed us from sin and death, protects us from every evil and directs us on our way to heaven that we might show forth His praise and glory before the world. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!"** (v.8)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.