

Sermon

Jesus is the Same Yesterday, Today and Forever

Pastor Lisa Giacomazza

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Our scripture from Hebrews talks about communal love, a mutual love that we have for one another, and in particular among the Christian community. We often refer to ourselves as a family – as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a particular kind of strength in relationship that we don't even sometimes feel from our own biological families. And in this scripture the relevance of this type of communal love is acknowledged and even celebrated.

When we talk about this it brings to mind the challenge of how people live today, at least it does for me. I can honestly say that I know significantly more people in my immediate circle who do not attend church than those that do. Some even question the relevance of church in our world today. It is something that I see so lacking in the lives of some of my loved ones and in many cases, I feel, they have no idea what they are missing.

But the author of our Hebrews text today certainly does. The author commands that we not neglect or overlook the practice of hospitality. The reference that “some have entertained angels without knowing it”. When this text was written, at the birth of Christianity, it was critically important for those early Christians to band together, support and love one another, because they were continually under attack and questioned for their choice of faith, their beliefs. In order for us to be here today, among other things, God sent this

message to encourage them to band together and care for one another. To strengthen the community.

Our scripture talks further about the sanctity of marriage – honoring marriage – and those threats against the marital bond. Adultery, fornication and those who break the bond between those who are married. Scripture warns against the allure of money and to practice restraint with our finances. I posted a quote this week “The bad news: You can’t have it all. The good news: you don’t need it all.”

What this scripture speaks to is what do we truly value and how do we live that value? The other question is, what we do as a people, as a church, does it really make a difference? In our lives and in the lives of our community?

Our Psalm today is a “wisdom” psalm where we are given instruction that will likely lead us to a full and happy life. It starts like this as you recall...

“Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments.

²Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

³Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever.”

Now to me this is where things get confusing...didn’t we just read about the allure of money and how we should avoid worshipping

materialistic things, idols...yet in this wisdom from our psalm, apparently the righteous are rewarded with wealth and riches.

So which is it? Well the interesting thing is, there is a difference in wealth in Biblical terms and what we have distorted to believe is wealth. There has always been greed and lust after treasure since the beginning of time. It's something that we as humans are very weak and easily persuaded towards. Why do we assume when we hear wealth and riches it refers to an excess of wealth or money and hoarding of resources? The bigger is better and more is more mentality. What if it means wealth of friendships...I mean wouldn't you rather have an excess of wonderful friends than a bank account with an excess of money? Now don't get me wrong, having extra money is very nice and can lead to great freedom in this world but having good friends, someone who will hold your hand when you receive bad news, someone who cares about how you feel – now this is true wealth.

So many young people lack friendships in their lives. They don't attend church or any group really in many cases. And its leading to some serious problems of loneliness and depression.

So yesterday and today, we are hosting a block party – a chance to share our treasure of friendship, and the love of God, with a community that could probably really use it. Maybe one or two will end up walking through our door someday...and find the

friendship they so desperately need. The righteous are gracious, compassionate and enjoy power and wealth to the benefit of the poor and disenfranchised, not to lord it over them. Evil people sometimes prosper and the pious can encounter unmerited suffering. But the believers, are wise enough to know that to truly be happy is to practice living according to God's commandments whether or not they receive material benefits. And we don't see God's commandments as rules that hold us down- they offer guidance that lead us to freedom.

I am certain that this weekend has already and will continue to enrich my life. Sharing who we are with our community and helping those who do not know how much fun it is to be part of a community of faith, and that we have plenty of room for them. And even though church is an afterthought for some and certainly not a priority for others, Jesus has not changed – Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Amen