

August 28, 2022

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

“Footholds of Faith”

Recently, we have seen challenges brought about by the war in Ukraine and natural disasters. We live with reminders of our polarization as Americans on a regular basis. This loss of life and the uncertainty of our belonging to one another can be disconcerting. It is easy to imagine we live in *uniquely difficult times*.

And yet, many of our forebears faced difficulties beyond those which dot the maps of our days. The recipients of the letter to the Hebrews faced division, religious persecution, jail, torture and the threat of death living as God’s children in their place and time. Our times may not be easy – but neither are they uniquely awful.

Our spiritual ancestors we refer to as “The Hebrews,” began to wonder how they could ever go on. And in response to the need and uncertainty of this community of faith the author of the letter we read from today wrote to encourage, focus and remind them of what was most important.

Having sketched out a wide-ranging arc of God’s faithfulness and the centrality of Christ – the author has come to a moment where the letter is about to close and there will surely be people thinking, **“Wow, a great reminder of God’s life in our midst – but I want to know – what are we supposed to do?”**

Our author gives us footholds of faith for the pragmatically minded. These footholds are examples of how we know we are on the right track as God’s children. And what is the first thing out of the gate to help us live a life of faith when we can’t look to the world around us to be reassured that everything is going to be okay? Love, of course. Let mutual love continue. The author has seen them living a life of faith together and knows they know how to take God’s love and share it with one another. “Let Mutual love continue!” When we aren’t sure what to do – the first and best thing we can do is love: When in doubt, love each other. It is a powerful foothold to scale the wall of God’s life into the future.

The footholds which follow fall in line under the umbrella of love. In my family we have a liturgy which helps us in times of misunderstanding or disagreement. When our children did things we found incomprehensible, we would stare at them and ask, **“What are we going to do with you?”**

After a pause we would say, ***“I guess we will love you.”*** When my wife or I are flummoxed by the other we say, “What am I going to do with you?” And whoever is the object of the question responds, ***“Love me, dear, love me.”***

We yearn for programmatic silver bullets. We want clarity and unanimity of purpose. We want to feel we belong with one another...and when it feels like these are unattainable...well...let mutual love continue. What are we going to do? Love each other.

The discussions of extending hospitality – even to the poorest of the poor – and remembering those in Prison or being tortured as if we ourselves are with them – These are concrete examples of how we love one another – even in difficult moments. In these cases, the springboard for love is recognition: ***Actually seeing the other person***. This is our call to leave behind the habit of living “out of sight - out of mind” and if someone suffers they probably deserve it.

That sex is relational and blossoms with fidelity. That money is a tool and not our God so we manage our money instead of money determining our lives. Each of these footholds are pragmatic *ways grace takes shape* in our lives. Living is all about being God’s faithful children.

Our author does not want us to assume a life of faith is first and foremost about telling who is in and who is out. Our author is showing us ***what it looks like*** when we choose well living as God’s loving children.

Presbyterians define a sacrament as “an invisible sign of an invisible grace instituted by Christ.” That’s why we have two and our Catholic brothers and sisters have seven. Their definition of sacrament doesn’t include “instituted by Christ.” Today I want to take a page from our loved ones in the Catholic tradition and, at least for a moment, drop that last qualifier. A sacrament is a visible sign of an invisible grace. Our text calls us today to live sacramental lives. To be visible signs of invisible grace.

When we sing our next song you will be tempted to think, “Pastor Mike must have picked this when he had covid brain – this is a communion hymn.” And that is true, but it is not a mistake. Let us imagine, as we sing, that the power of sacrament is not only a blessing for us – but also a way of life. God give us sacramental footholds for living – now and always.