

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

August 28, 2022
The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Luke 14:1, 7-14
Proverbs 25:6-7
Psalm 112
Hebrews 13:1-8,15-16

In the past two weeks, I have officiated at two funerals and one wedding. The first funeral for Billy, celebrated 93 well-lived years. The second funeral was for Dylan, a 26 year old who lost his battle with drug addiction. The wedding was for two high school sweethearts who had built their life together through college and into their early careers.

It has been two weeks that have bracketed some of our most profound moments as humans. The good and the bad, the joyful and the painful. A life well lived, a life taken too soon, and two lives looking with anticipation toward the future.

I have thought about each of these individuals so much over these last two weeks. How their lives held so much hope and love...some of it realized, some of it not realized. Some of it full of joy, and some full of pain. But, the more I thought about the fullness of life, the more I thought about how God has graced us immeasurably with the opportunity to live...really live and to take nothing for granted.

Because we get this one beautiful life on earth...and It's not about getting it all right or being the best or having it all. It's about humbly and gratefully being the person God made you to be.

To be very transparent with you this morning, I am tired. I am tired of the way so many of us are wasting the life we are given. I am tired of the way we are pitting ourselves against one another in black and white dichotomies, of good and evil, this side or that. As though an opinion, if different than yours or mine, taints the other person's soul and makes them an enemy. Is this how God wanted us to live? In opposition to each other's very humanity?

I am tired of our self-righteousness. As though any one person can have an ultimate claim on the Word of God...of right and wrong, of moral and immoral. Where one person's perspective forgets another's perspective and in the midst of the debate we all forget about loving our neighbor. We forget about taking care of the poor and the hungry, the sick and the alienated in order to prove our point of being on the right side of God or the right side of politics or the ride side of social norms.

I am tired of division. I am tired of greed. I am tired of power. Because no one on their death bed is every going to tell you...man, I wish I had begged, borrowed, cheated, or stolen just a little more. I wish I had gotten my way at whatever cost to my friends and my family. I wish I had done a better job of disregarding and diminishing that other group for their beliefs.

And yet, how often is this the narrative all around us these days? We are so afraid to sit in the grey areas of life. To sit and be OK with difference without being defensive. To appreciate and not alienate. And it needs to be said, Jesus loved the grey areas. He loved being in the midst of the uncomfortable and the socially unacceptable. He loved challenging people to expand their perspectives to ensure that everyone was cared for. There were no qualifiers to Jesus' grey areas. He didn't define worth based upon social status, gender, financial gain, or political affiliation. He didn't define worth by power, privilege, or pride.

If these past two weeks have taught me anything, they have taught me that whatever my past failings have been; however I have fallen short of God's will for my life, however I have damaged relationships or hurt my own heart, I still have time to get it right. We all still have time to align our lives with the things that matter most. We all still have time to get back to the basics of our faith and live as Jesus taught us to live.

I have spent a lot of time with our text from Hebrews this week. It's a powerful statement about how to align our hearts with Jesus. How to live as God intends for us to live. How to reevaluate our choices and recalibrate our actions.

There are a few important concepts from our text that I think are integral to helping us navigate this difficult, divisive time we are in. They are:

Mutual love (the corner stone)
 Hospitality, Integrity, Contentment (the building blocks)
 Vitality (the outcome)

The message of Hebrews is that these 5 things bring about the realignment that will heal our communities and our lives. They bring about a sense of humility in our hearts where we cease to seek power or privilege over the well-being of someone else. And they bring about a powerful practice that is based upon the common good. They move us beyond our individual, self-serving goals and place the focus on communal goals so that every single one of God's beloved creation can live in wholeness. No self-righteousness. No division. No greed.

The first thing that our text from Hebrews highlights is mutual love.

¹Let mutual love continue.

That's the kind of love that reaches beyond our differences and brings us together as one body. Mutual love isn't done in isolation. It requires a coming together, a being with, that allows us to look beyond ourselves and outward to the needs of others. It doesn't say, let individual love continue. It says, let mutual love continue. Mutual love can't flourish when we are divided and at odds. Mutual love can flourish when we are willing to be open and compassionate and kind. That doesn't mean agreeing. But it does mean respecting and honoring each person as a child of God. That's the cornerstone.

Hebrews goes on to outline 3 things that help us grasp how to carry out mutual love. They are hospitality, integrity, and contentment. These are the building blocks of mutual love.

Hospitality provides for us a way to express mutual love...to strangers, those in prison, to people you may not know or even like.

²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.

Hospitality is all encompassing. You work to take care of others even if it comes at some risk or cost to yourself. You show hospitality even in the most challenging of circumstances. Hospitality is risky and it's not always easy but the rewards are beyond measure. It changes lives. It lifts up those who have lost hope. It provides support to those who are lonely. It gives nourishment to those who have fallen on hard times. It says, we are in this together and you are not alone.

And then there is integrity. Integrity is our desire to live in right action through our choices.

⁴Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers.

Verse 4 isn't meant to relegate integrity to only issues of marital faithfulness. It gives us an example of how integrity is lived out in real time. Temptations of all kinds will haunt us no matter who we are. We will have to make choices. And those choices aren't meant to elevate us above others or to help us get our way at the cost of someone else or to get away with actions we know are wrong. Our choices are meant to bring us back to mutual love in thought, word, and deed. When we are tempted we come back to the person Jesus desires us to be.

The third aspect of mutual love is contentment.

⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." ⁶So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

We are called to be happy with what we have, to not covet what others may have, and to not be overcome with the need for more...more money, more things, more power, more influence. And, we are called to share, to take care of the poor and the prisoner, those less fortunate or those who have fallen on hard times...the drug addict, the homeless, the single parent, the elderly woman, the foster child.

This may be one of the hardest concepts to navigate in our world today. Look around and it's so easy to find those times where we judge others and worry if they will take advantage of our generosity. Where any kind of assistance seems to threaten our own stability. But if we are

truly content, we are able to trust God's provisions in our lives and that allows our hearts to open to the needs of those around us.

The final lesson from Hebrews is vitality. This can be described as the culmination of our practice of mutual love, of our commitment to hospitality, integrity, and contentment.

¹⁵Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

When we please God through our actions, words, and deeds, we practice mutual love. And when we practice mutual love, everyone is able to thrive. Everyone is able to live as God intended. What pleases God is good. It is good because we are meant to live from a place of vitality, a place of wholeness. And vitality does not and cannot flourish when we are divided and in conflict with one another.

Folks, the best I can today is ask all of us to consider how we are living. If you are off track, you have time to realign your actions and your heart toward Jesus. You have the opportunity to mend relationships. You have the opportunity to make a difference in this world through the way you love and help and encourage others. You have the opportunity to bring peace and wholeness to this world.

And that is pleasing to God. Amen.