

**Keep On Loving One Another**  
**August 29, 2010**  
**[Hebrews 13:1 – 8](#)**

**The Word of God for the People of God.**

<sup>1</sup>Keep on loving each other as brothers. <sup>2</sup>Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. <sup>3</sup>Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

<sup>4</sup>Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. <sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you;  
never will I forsake you." <sup>6</sup>So we say with confidence,  
"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.  
What can man do to me?"

<sup>7</sup>Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. <sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

**This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray:

*O merciful God, take pity on those souls who seemingly have no one to intercede on their behalf; those who, either through the negligence of those who are alive, or through the passage of time have been forgotten by their friends and by all. Today help us to remember those who have been forgotten, marginalized and simply set aside as we ask through faith and through love that you spare them, O Lord, and remember Your own mercy, especially during the times in our lives we fail to appeal to it.*

*Let not the souls which You have created be kept from You, their Creator and may the souls of all the faithful who have departed, through Your Mercy, rest in peace.*

*Amen.*

(Adapted from 'A Prayer For The Forgotten Dead' <http://www.catholic.org/prayers/prayer.php?p=753>)

What an amazing journey the past three weeks have offered us. We began by looking at the importance of ‘Walk[ing] by Faith’ ([Hebrews 11:1 – 3, 8 – 16](#)). During our morning discussion we considered Paul’s roll call of the faithful and we found that the list not only included the seemingly best of the best, but also included those who may have easily been forgotten, such as Rahab the prostitute; who’s actions allowed for the protection of her family and the eventual birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. During our time together we have given our selves permission to reflect on our journey as we have considered what it will be like ‘When All is Said and Done’ ([Hebrews 11:29 – 12:2](#)). Regardless of whether or not we ever come to see the things that God has promised us become manifest in our own lifetime, we should find comfort and joy in knowing that God has a plan and that each and every one of us plays an integral part in the *bursting forth of God’s Kingdom* into this lost and dying world. Last Sunday we took the time to anticipate the end of our journey as we together we compared and contrasted the fiery, fearful Mount Sinai with ‘The Mountain to Which We Have Come’ ([Hebrews 12:18 – 29](#)), that is Mount Zion; a place where thousands upon thousands of angels are gathered in joyful assembly and where we find our Creator and our God joined by the actual presence of not only those who were listed earlier on the roll call of the faithful, but all the faithful who have gone on before us. We have been called to *Walk* together, to *Reflect* together and we have been called to *Assemble* together in the promises of our Creator and in the hope that is Christ Jesus.

Today we end our study in the book of Hebrews with the exhortations that conclude Paul’s letter to the people to which he is writing. So what exactly is an exhortation? An *exhortation* is a communication intended to urge or persuade the recipients to take certain (and often specific) action. Though the exhortations read this morning are many, I believe that we can

safely say that these can be summarized easily under a single doctrinal and theological umbrella; that is, we are called to ‘Keep on loving one another.’ (v. 1)

Now, the language here is interesting; for if we are to “keep on loving,” then it is implied that *love* is something that has been and/or is currently being expressed. Here at New Day our motto is, ‘One God, One Love;’ an important Word given to us by our Creator during a service early on in our ministry through our brother J.R. These words are printed in our bulletin each week, are pasted on every page of our website and are posted in our foyer. Though a powerful Word, I wonder if any of us even take notice of it any more, at least as often as we did in the beginning. Certainly there is love to be offered and gained at New Day and certainly there is love to be offered and gained through Christian community but are we cognitively aware of the many opportunities we truly have to express that love or are we simply finding ourselves in a *love rut*?

It’s easy to express love to those who are with us each Sunday or Tuesday as we gather in teaching and fellowship, but there are so many others that we have the opportunity to love, as well. This awareness is what I believe Paul is calling us to this morning in the opening lines of Chapter 13. So, I want to take a few moments today to look at these subgroups and offer a challenge to you today to seek out the opportunities God gives us to not only love those with whom we gather each week, but also those to whom we encounter in our daily lives.

Verse 1 begins this morning with the words, “Keep on loving each other.” The exhortation here most certainly includes those gathered here today, but it is not limited to only those gathered here to whom we have a special connection. The exhortation includes *All* those who are gathered here each week.

Classes began this week for our students in Stephens County and as with the beginning of each new semester, I found myself with the opportunity to lay down some ground rules with my students not only concerning how they are expected to perform academically, but also about how they are to behave as members of our [Learning Community](#). As I began speaking with them this week, I realized that the advice, the exhortations if you will, that I offer them each semester are reminiscent of what Paul is saying in Hebrews 13 and so I want to take just a moment to offer you the same advice I give to them.

First and foremost, I remind them that they are a *community*. Regardless of whether they chose to be a part of the community or not, they are now a part of a *community of learners*. They will find themselves not only learning about mathematics, but they will also find themselves learning about one another. Equally important is their realization that not only will they be learning *from* one another, but they will be *teaching* one another, including me, as well. Through their actions, their words, the way that they dress and the way in which they respond to one another will speak volumes about who they are as individuals; the values that they hold dear and their system of morals and beliefs. Isn't it much the same way with us? Don't we also give verbal and nonverbal clues to one another each week that speak to our values, our morals and our beliefs? Paul believed so, and so we too must consider the possibility that we are not only a community of faith, but a community of learners; one that is ever reflective of who we are and what we believe; reflective of what we each find valuable and what we each hold dear in our lives.

“It does not matter whether or not you like the person sitting next to you or across the room from you,” I tell them each semester, “You must still remember to respect one another.” Each and every child in my classroom has value and worth; not only am *I* called to remember

this, but it is a call that each student in the classroom must held accountable to. Likewise, each and every person that walks through our doors, whether it is for the first time or their 100<sup>th</sup> time, that individual has value and worth. Paul calls us to “Keep on loving each other;” to keep on loving one another like family.

I know that each of us has at least one person in our own biological family that is hard to love, but there is a bond created by flesh and blood that holds us together so strongly that if anyone offered an ill word towards them we would find ourselves fighting for their honor and for their sense of self worth. Why is it not the same in our faith community? As children of the Living God are we not part of the Family of God? We may not all like one another at times and most certainly there are going to be individuals that make their way into our faith community that, for lack of a better word, drive us absolutely insane but that does not make that person any less valuable to the ministry to which we have been called nor does it take away from the value of that person. What is it that Paul is calling us to? Who is it that we are to ‘keep on loving?’ EACH OTHER! Not just those who are easy to love but we are called to keep on loving *ALL* those who belong to our community.

But the buck doesn’t stop there. Paul states in verse 2 that we are not to ‘forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.’ A person comes up to you on the street and asks you for change for a cup of coffee, a Jehovah’s Witness knocks on your door and ask for 5 minutes of our time, a child in the grocery store takes interest in your cane, your artificial limb or a scar on your face. How do we respond? Do we egregiously turn them away without a second thought or do we entertain them? Do we entertain them through the power, mercy and love of God or do we simply dismiss them as if we have any entitlement that permits us to do so?

I'm not sure if you are taken back by verse 2 in the same way that our Tuesday night group was this past week, but I do want to draw attention to their comments and insight. So let me ask, "When you read verse 2 which states, 'Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it,' does any particular story or teaching from the Bible come to mind? (Think about it for a moment. No really, think about. . .)

Our Tuesday group recently ended a discussion on the "Bible and Homosexuality," so for them the reference may have been quite clear. Maybe not so much for those who did not have an opportunity to join us, but there are indeed two references I would like to offer. The first is from [Genesis 18:1 – 8](#) which begins with these words, "*The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre (MAM-ree) while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.*" ([Genesis 18:1 – 2](#)) Had Abraham dismissed these strangers from his presence he may have missed out on a great blessing from God. These three visitors had been sent by God to deliver a message to Abraham; that he and Sarah would have a child in their old age.

Likewise, these strangers consisted of the same travelers who came to Lot in the city of Sodom and Gomorrah. "*The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. 'My lords,' he said, 'please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning.'*

*'No,' they answered, 'we will spend the night in the square.'*

*But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate."* ([Genesis 19:1 – 3](#))

These angels were there to save Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (not as a result of the lusts of the people of the city, but as a result of their greed and inhospitable ways). Simply stated, we never know when God is going to send strangers into our lives to bring us a word or to offer us a blessing. We are to entertain the strangers we encounter, for in doing so, some, like Abraham and Lot, have entertained angels.

The last group mentioned here this morning collectively describes two groups; those who have been imprisoned and those who have been mistreated. We are called to, “Remember those in prison,” Paul writes, “as if you were their fellow prisoners, and [to remember] those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” I am not going to talk about this group this morning. Rather we will pick up next week with this group which will offer a nice segue into next week’s reading. ([Philemon 1 – 21](#)). I do, however, want you to think about these two subgroups this week. Who in our lives do we know that are imprisoned? Who in our lives do we know that have been mistreated? As you think about these two groups I want to encourage you to move beyond the obvious answers and let God guide your responses.

If you have not come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, I encourage you do to so today. We are not promised tomorrow, but we are promised a future either with or without God by our side. The choice is ours to make. Today is the day to choose life and I encourage you to do so without hesitation. Pastor Brian once commented that when people ask, ‘how you are doing,’ that it is appropriate to answer, “My Soul is well.” Is your soul well today? Would you like for it to be? The altar is open to each and every one of you today who is seeking reconciliation, acceptance, love and the favor of God in your life today.

To the One whose name is above every other, let us give thanks and praise today for the life and the love that has been so freely offered to each of us. Amen!