

“Sparks Rekindled”

Sermon for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ),
Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, November 16, 2014

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Holy Scriptures: I Thessalonians 5: 1-11

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape!

4 But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; **5** for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. **6** So then let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; **7** for those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

9 For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Sermon

*“Since we belong to the day,
let us be sober,
and put on the breastplate of faith and love,
and for a helmet the hope of salvation.*

9 *For God has destined us not for wrath*

*but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus
Christ,*

10 *who died for us,*

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we may live with him.

11 *Therefore encourage one another and build up each
other,*

as indeed you are doing.”

The stuff of legends

Mexico City, 1968: Bob Beamon leapt 29 feet, 2 and 1/2
inches,

besting the previous record long jump by almost 2
feet.

Barcelona, 1992: Jackie Joyner Kersee won gold in

the Heptathlon *for the 2nd time.*

Yankee Stadium: In 1961, Roger Maris hit 61 homeruns,
breaking Babe Ruth's record that had stood for 34
years.

Another Yankee Lou Gehrig playing in 2,130 consecutive
major league baseball games.

Imagine Lou Gehrig going down in the record books as one
of the best of all time,

and being honored because he showed up to work and
did his best,

rain or shine, every game day,

never looking for glory,

always looking to the next pitch,
next groundball, next day.

After Baltimore Orioles shortstop Cal Ripken, Jr., broke Lou
Gehrig's record

for the most consecutive baseball games played

(Ripkin would add 500 to reach 2,632),

we were inundated by the media

with tales of other records and
great sports feats.

This week Al Roker set the world record for longest continuous live weather broadcast.

Are you like me, thinking that was a lot of air time

to have to find creative ways to repeat the words Polar Vortex?

There are plenty of world records that don't get the same kind of publicity.

How about the Englishman who ran nearly 30 miles in 4 hours and 18 minutes,

all the while balancing a fresh egg on a spoon,

or the gentleman who stood absolutely still for over 15 hours?

If you're ever in the need for a little exercise,

aim for the record for consecutive pogo-stick jumps -- 177,000.

The stuff of legends

Think about the record holders we know

who don't get the recognition or air play they well deserve:

Like our friends Elizabeth, Peggy and Laura who have volunteered at a local hospital

and in community agencies and regional ministries

for countless hours...for years;

like my brother Jonathan who coached his two sons' little league and high school teams

yet also made time to coach inner city kids to become filmmakers;

like a poet friend named Kam who published Haiku poems and then gave copies away;

like my cousin George, the pharmaceutical chemist, who works overtime

to ensure that his company produces safe, reliable products;

like our church members and friends

who make sure delicious meals are served and grace bestowed at

Hagar's House Shelter for women and children;

who sacrifice precious time to prepare to share the Good News

with their neighbor's children here on Sundays;

who reach out to the lost, the last and the least of these

with love and a smile and a willingness to walk

the extra mile;

who keep the church in ship shape and who shape up
broken souls;

who are pumped about making Christmas wreathes

and even more pumped about having fun,
making new friends,

and building stronger relationships.

These followers of Jesus may not make the Guinness Book of
World Records

for their servant leadership and community service
above self,

for the record number of times they have
forgiven and forgotten,

for the Christian values they have shared
and embodied.

There are no statistics to keep for the works our Lord Jesus
Christ values

-- like generosity, compassion, justice advocacy,
tolerance, hospitality –

only the personal joy and communal
satisfaction of knowing

that God's people will go down in
history,

will make a difference today,

and will one fine day go up

to heaven.

The stuff of legends

Ecclesiasticus 44: 1 proclaims the fame of the faithful, stating:

“Let us now praise famous men,

and our ancestors that begat us...

All these were honored in their generations,

and were the glory of their times.”

This morning we celebrate every day, workaday folks

who live out their faith and utilize their God-given gifts and abilities,

who make themselves available and visible

for a cause greater than our self.

The heroes of the Christian faith are the people from all walks of life

who have led the fight as soldiers for God’s truth and justice.

We do ourselves a disservice if we think of heroes as “others,”

as super humans, as people with more skills, talents,
or capability

than we possess or have access to.

Paul said, *“Since we belong to the day,*

let us be sober,

and put on the breastplate of faith and love,

and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

In order to be a hero, to be heroic, to touch a life and change
the world

one need not be born with a silver spoon and all the
creature comforts of life

or be blessed with superhuman strength or eye-
hand coordination;

one only needs a heart full of faith, the willingness to
be available,

and the courage to act out one’s convictions.

Sometimes this means acting boldly,

without calculating the cost

and without considering the social implications.

Today’s heroes stand for justice and mercy;

they stand up for the downtrodden and lift up the
downhearted.

We all have the same opportunity to tap into Jesus Christ,
the same direct access to the same source of strength.

Do we use our gifts for the glory of God or do we seek
vainglory?

Do we share what we have been given for the sake of
Kingdom building

or do we hide and hoard our talents?

Do we multiply the goodness that God can do by affirming
one another,

by encouraging and cheering each other on

or do we give in to despair and disappointment,
focus on fear and death

and put down what God is trying to
build up?

“Once our imagination turns from death

*it becomes apparent that death isn't the only thing
going on out there.*

*A recent book by Larry Pray and Gary Gunderson called
The Leading Causes of Life*

helps readers to focus in on five powerful concepts:

*Connection, Coherence, Agency, Blessing, and
Hope.”*

This is the stuff of legends

Show me life

Live into life as Jesus would have you to live

The Apostle Paul weighs in on our questions and anxieties.

9 *For God has destined us not for wrath*

but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 *who died for us,*

so that whether we are awake or asleep

we may live with him.

11 *Therefore encourage one another and build up each other,*

as indeed you are doing.”

Paul points out to the church in Thessalonica and to Decatur First Christian

what the church is called to be and share.

We are to lift up one another and build the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

Each of us as a member and friend within the Body of Christ has talent;

the whole people of God are called, baptized and commissioned

to utilize our talents and resources to the glory of God.

Are you weary?

Be encouraged! Help and hope are here for you.

Know someone who is weary?

See someone else unsure or unloved or unable?

Rekindle their spark with words of grace and your loving presence.

Sparks rekindled can set a bonfire ablaze

and offer to the world hope and support.

At times it may seem like we may live in a Good Friday world;

remember, my friends, we are an Easter morning people.

Paul teaches us that although there are some things we do not know,

such as when the Day of the Lord will arrive,

there are many things which we do know.

We do know that the day of the Lord is coming.

We do know that the Lord is none other than Jesus Christ

“who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep

we may live with him.”

We do know, therefore, that God’s judgment should not dismay us,

for we live with the assurance that God is a God of grace.

Filled with this faith, informed with this knowledge,

and confident with this assurance of grace,

we recognize the difference

that our faith in Jesus Christ makes in our lives.

With this faith we do not confuse our condition with our identity.

We are defined by God, not by whatever condition we are in.

Our identities are given through the work of God in Christ.

We are children of the light and children of the day.

We live our lives before God.

We are accountable to the Word of God.

We are to live in conformity to God's will.

“For God has not destined us for wrath,

but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep

we might live with him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

The stuff of legends

The following version of Ben Hooper's life

was presented in a 2001 collection of anecdotes by Dr. Fred Craddock,

who served here in Decatur First Christian as an elder for many years

before being called to minister

at Cherry Log Christian Church in Blue Ridge, Georgia.

Ben W. Hooper (1870-1957) was born out of wedlock in Newport, Tennessee,

on October 13 to Sarah Wade, daughter of an Italian immigrant,

and Dr. L. W. Hooper, a physician who had served in the Union army.

It was a well-known fact in the community

that Dr. Hooper refused to marry Sarah

because he was engaged to another woman.

Soon after Bennie's birth,

Sarah's father moved the family to another town.

Through the age of eight the boy lived in a number of small towns in Tennessee

while his mother looked for work.

Dr. Craddock quotes Hooper thus:

“When I went into town with my mother, I could see people staring at me,

making guesses as to who was my father.

At school, the children said ugly things to me,

and I stayed to myself during recess, and ate lunch alone.”

“One Sunday [in church] some people queued up in the aisle before I could get out,

and I was stopped by a large, heavy hand on my shoulder.

Turning, I caught a glimpse of the minister studying my face.

I knew he was going to make a guess as to who my father was.

A moment later he said, ‘Well, boy, you’re a child of...’

and he paused.

I knew it was coming;

I knew I would have my feelings hurt

and I would not go back to church again!

He said, ‘Boy, you are a child of God. I see a striking resemblance.’

Then he swatted me on the bottom and said, ‘Now, you go claim your inheritance.’

I left the building a different person;

in fact that was really the beginning of my life.”

Someone looked past and beyond a condition and saw an identity.

A spark was kindled, and one day Ben Hooper became the Lt. Governor.

This week, whose life are you going to spark with the love of Jesus Christ?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!