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3:33

Keep On Loving

Hebrews 13:1-8

- I. *It is needed from us.*
- II. *It is given to us.*

One of the most heartwarming stories shared on the big screen in a long time is the story of Michael Oher. The movie is called The Blind Side and it is a love story. No it is not the kind of love story where a man and a woman fall in love and live happily ever after but it is a love story of how a family, the Tuohy family, opened up their hearts, their home and their lives to someone in need and in the process everyone's life changed for the better.

Michael Oher, "Big Mike" comes from a broken, dysfunctional home: he does not know who his father is and his mother is distant, ineffectual and addicted to drugs. Through a course of events the Tuohys learn of Michael's need—he doesn't have a place to stay. What begins as providing him temporary shelter unfolds into giving Michael a home and a welcome to their family. In the end Michael is able to finish school, go on to college and eventually is drafted by the Baltimore Ravens where he continues to play professional football to this day.

The movie reminds us that what is needed most by people is love. Where there is love there is family, where there is family there is home. Today as we gather in God's house as His family we are encouraged to love.

Hebrews is a sermon from a Christian to Christians. These words are encouraged to believers for a very simple reason: people need love and it is God's will that love be given within the church family. **"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have."** (verses 1-5a).

At first hearing this might seem to be a loose connection of moralisms but there is something much deeper here. First of all we must remember the context and the setting of what after all is a sermon we now know as the book of Hebrews. This sermon was delivered at a time when the entire Christian church was relatively young, scattered, persecuted but also growing and vibrant. This vibrancy is brought out in the words, "keep on loving..."

In the early church as the message of the Gospel was spreading out from Jerusalem to all the corners of the world missionaries and evangelists

would travel bringing the message of Christ to fresh ears. The life of Paul paints a nice portrait of this for us. Sometimes the message was warmly received, other times it wasn't. Sometimes there was a base of people or a local synagogue to work from, other times there wasn't. A simple basic need these people had was a place to stay.

When the author of the Hebrews preached not to forget to entertain strangers he was really encouraging the faithful to provide shelter for those coming in the name of God. This, after all, is what faithful people of God had done in the past. This helps us understand what may at first seem like a strange teaching: that some people have entertained angels without knowing it. In fact both Abraham and Lot welcomed strangers into their midst: Abraham welcomed three strangers and gave them food and water. One of these ended up being God! (see Genesis chapter 18.) Lot, while he was in Sodom welcomed two strangers into his home and provided them with shelter from the dangers of the city. Neither Abraham nor Lot knew at first whom they were welcoming into their homes.

We do well to remember that the message of the gospel was not welcomed by many. In fact the early church found willing persecutors in both the Jews as well as the Romans among others. Paul and others were persecuted and imprisoned for their faithfulness to God. They were cut off, they were persecuted and they were in deep need for prayer and fellowship. What they needed was the love of God shown through the body of Christ.

How then can we understand the rather abrupt shift into keeping marriage honorable and chaste? The author of Hebrews is doing something rather simple yet powerful: he transitions from those most distant and most cut off from us within the church—Christians we do not yet know and those who have been removed from our midst—and he transitions to the person most close to us, namely our spouse. Our husband or wife in the faith is our first and closest neighbor. What kind of love do they need from us? The need the love of fidelity and faithfulness.

This also helps us understand the move to the topic of money. Jesus taught: **"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matthew 6:21). The matter of love is a matter of the heart, it is a matter of behavior. As Christians we do not want to hear these words from Hebrews and limit them to simple reminders to open our houses and to remember those in prison. No, the message is deeper than this. The real message is that love is something that is active and it displays itself whenever and wherever someone is in need. That is why there will always be a need for the church displaying Christ's love.

Today how often do we have a request to provide shelter for someone in need? In the two years that I have been here I can think of two times: the time when the youth from a WELS congregation in Virginia was on their way

to the national youth event and the second time when the seminary choir came to Moline to give a concert.

If we look to the deeper message of what Hebrews is telling us however we see a need all the time. In the ancient church there was a need to provide housing for those carrying out the message of the Gospel. How different is that than the need today to have primary and secondary schools to develop trained workers for the church? How different is that than to provide resources for those who are missionaries in our name today?

There are other needs that don't seem to change much over time. Two thousand years ago the common culture that Christians found themselves living under was a culture of sexual immorality and hedonism. Sadly, today isn't much different. We can ask ourselves: what do people need from the church today?

Those within our church today need encouragement from one another to go against the grain of our every day culture. Those within our church today need understanding and encouragement that raising children in the ways of God isn't always so easy but the price is worth the outcome.

As the culture gets further away from the Bible people need to be encouraged that we do not have to make concessions to the world and that God is there equipping us to live lives fundamentally different than the ways of the world. In a world that supposedly is more connected than ever before yet struggles with loneliness and often despair the church can be the witness to true fellowship and community.

One of the great needs of today is the need of encouragement. If you want to love someone in the name of Christ today do so by being a part of their life. Be encouraging. Today's text tells us: **"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith."** (verse 7).

We live in a world that is drastically, quickly changing. The needs of the early church are not necessarily the needs of today. What the members of the church needed practically fifty years ago are in many ways different than the practical wisdom and needs of today. The one thing that doesn't change is the need for love; today in the book of Hebrews we are also reminded of something else that doesn't change, Jesus. **"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."** (verse 8).

God loves us and that love never changes. God loved us before we were even aware of our tremendous need for love and forgiveness. **"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.**

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans

5:6-8). That is the love we have received and continue to receive. Today we have the bold promise of God: **"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."** (verse 5b).

The movie The Blind Side is a story of love and it has a happy ending. If there is anything sad about the movie it is the fact that it was such a refreshing story so unlike much of what we see in the world around us today. The world has people without families, without homes, and at times without hope. As the family of Christ we have all three.