

13th Sunday after Trinity

Psalm: 118

118 O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.

² Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth forever.

³ Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth forever.

⁴ Let them now that fear the Lord say, that his mercy endureth for ever.

⁵ I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, and set me in a large place.

⁶ The Lord is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?

⁷ The Lord taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me.

⁸ It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man.

⁹ It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

¹⁰ All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord will I destroy them.

¹¹ They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.

¹² They compassed me about like bees: they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them.

¹³ Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the Lord helped me.

¹⁴ The Lord is my strength and song, and is become my salvation.

¹⁵ The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.

¹⁶ The right hand of the Lord is exalted: the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly.

¹⁷ I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.

¹⁸ The Lord hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death.

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord:

²⁰ This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter.

²¹ I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.

²² The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

²³ This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

²⁴ This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

²⁵ Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

²⁶ Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord.

²⁷ God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

²⁸ Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.

²⁹ O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.

First Lesson: Genesis 42:1-5, 11-16, 26-34

42 Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another?

² And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die.

³ And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.

⁴ But Benjamin, Joseph's brother, Jacob sent not with his brethren; for he said, Lest peradventure mischief befall him.

⁵ And the sons of Israel came to buy corn among those that came: for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 42:11-16

¹¹ We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies.

¹² And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

¹³ And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

¹⁴ And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

¹⁵ Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither.

¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies.

Genesis 42:26-34

²⁶ And they laded their asses with the corn, and departed thence.

²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his ass provender in the inn, he espied his money; for, behold, it was in his sack's mouth.

²⁸ And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us?

²⁹ And they came unto Jacob their father unto the land of Canaan, and told him all that befell unto them; saying,

³⁰ The man, who is the lord of the land, spake roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country.

³¹ And we said unto him, We are true men; we are no spies:

³² We be twelve brethren, sons of our father; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

³³ And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, Hereby shall I know that ye are true men; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone:

³⁴ And bring your youngest brother unto me: then shall I know that ye are no spies, but that ye are true men: so will I deliver you your brother, and ye shall traffick in the land.

Second Lesson: Hebrews 13:1-21

13 Let brotherly love continue.

² Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

³ Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

⁴ Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

⁵ Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

⁶ So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

⁷ Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

⁸ Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

⁹ Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

¹⁰ We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

¹¹ For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp.

¹² Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

¹³ Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

¹⁴ For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

¹⁵ By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

¹⁶ But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

¹⁷ Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

¹⁸ Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

¹⁹ But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

²⁰ Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

²¹ Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction

Many years ago, a young man was sitting in a booth at a local diner. Across from him sat two Anglican deacons, smiling and focused on the conversation. The man had recently ventured into the Anglican church and was intrigued by the sense of familiarity and comfort the liturgy brought. However, after years working in law enforcement and seeing parts of the world most people could not imagine, he was skeptical about organized religion and what the church could offer. He looked at them as he ranted and raved about the condition of the world, silently appreciating that they had not worn their collars to the meeting. Imagine the other restaurant patrons seeing this conclave and wondering how messed up this poor chap was that he required TWO clergy to set him straight. As the man talked it was clear he was more worried about the behavior of other people in the church than he was about what it could offer in terms of salvation and spiritual growth. “There are more hypocrites per square inch of church pew than anywhere else” he ranted. “People just come to church, get their spiritual mulligan, then go back into the world with no real repentance or change.” Both deacons just listened and offered solid feedback to the man, gently and with grace offering alternatives and redirection. Eventually after a long conversation, they left together and it was enough to have planted a seed inside him. A seed of hope and faith along with a sense that God had a plan for him. He was a piece of clay on the Potter’s wheel, slowly and

deliberately God would shape and mold him into what he was designed to be. He needed to run his own race and focus on what God was saying to him.

For many of you who have heard my tale, you probably recognized this man sitting in the diner booth as me and the deacons across the table as Fr. Chris and Bill. That day a journey began in me where I started to listen to what God was putting in my heart and less on what society was telling me. The accuser doesn't go after the sinner who revels in the evil, but rather, "*your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion,*" (1 Peter 5:8) searches for those who are seeking truth but are not sure and who are easily redirected. In my early days of coming to church, I loved the majestic hymns, the beautifully written liturgy, and the company of other Christians, but I felt like I needed more. My life was chaotic and full of stress and anxiety. While the thoughts of heaven and salvation were comforting, navigating Monday morning was more challenging.

As I was preparing for Morning Prayer, I realized that this is the exact question Hebrews 13 is written to answer. Earlier in the letter, the writer reminds them of a time when they faced public ridicule, had their property confiscated, and stood loyally by friends who were thrown in prison (Hebrews 10:32–34). But now, they are feeling culturally isolated, weary, and questioning things that made them silently drift backwards in their faith. The entire letter cultivating in the practical ethics of Chapter 13, was written as a pastoral rescue mission to address several

critical vulnerabilities. The writer of Hebrews doesn't give them a theological essay for Monday morning; he gives them a checklist of how to endure and reenergize the spiritual fatigue they were experiencing. Similar to what I was searching for, it is important for people to recognize how the unchanging Christ anchors us not just for eternity, but for the messy realities of the week ahead. Let's look at the words the author of Hebrews used to encourage and ground the first century Jewish Christians in their faith.

Body

As the Epistle to the Hebrews reaches its final chapter, the lofty theology it contains hits the ground and shifts from heavenly ministry to the things we can all do to combat spiritual fatigue, love all of our neighbors, and to focus our concentration on Someone who has never changed and remains the only anchor for our faith, Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The chapter begins with practical commands of hospitality and solidarity. *“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body”* (Hebrews 13:1-3)

Let brotherly love continue, remember strangers (alluding to Abraham and Lot entertaining angels from Genesis 18 and 19) and identify with, and help, those in prison.

In the ancient world, prisoners relied entirely on outside visitors for survival, and it is always a good reminder to remember that everyone you meet is suffering in some manner or experiencing some adversity. The great actor and comedian, Robin Williams, is quoted as saying, *"Everyone you meet is fighting a battle you know nothing about. Be kind. Always."*

In verses 4-6, we are encouraged to honor marriage and free ourselves from the love of money or anything that moves us away from God. *"Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*

(v. 4-5) In verse 6 we are reminded that our ethical behavior and life isn't grounded by laws and earthly constraints, it is anchored in the knowledge that we are permanently cemented by God's presence. *"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* (v.6) We don't chase security through money or possessions because God Himself will assist us and take away our fears.

In verse 7-16, we focus on the eternally unchanging, unwavering Christ that we give our lives in service to. *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.”* (v.8). In a shifting, unstable culture full of *“divers and strange doctrines”* (v.9) our anchor is Christ, not a current popular philosophy or a new trend.

The writer of the Epistle then tells believers, *“Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”* (v.13). This encourages the people to leave the safety, familiarity, and social acceptance of traditional Judaism to follow a rejected Jesus. Verses 14-16 explain why this matters: *“For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”* Through Jesus, we continually offer a "sacrifice of praise", the good things that result in "lips that acknowledge and give thanks to His name", coupled with the active sacrifice of doing good and sharing, are how we should proceed in life. Worship of God and service to others are inseparable.

Our Epistle ends with a benediction and shift in focus. The writer commands them to do all these hard things, but then turns around and prays that God will equip them: *"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that*

which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (v.20-21).

Action

Echoing this petition and final blessing, in our Collect for today we acknowledge that our "true and laudable service" only comes as a gift from God. We pray that we “may faithfully serve thee in this life”. We are asked to do difficult things and to endure many struggles and afflictions, but we do not white knuckle our way into holiness. We ask God to shape us from the inside out. Today, after we sing the hymns, we confess our sins unto Almighty God, and we reflect on the lessons and liturgy, let us walk out into the world with a different focus and mindset. Where is God calling you to show hospitality, to honor your commitments, or to trust His provision rather than hoping for earthly reward or favor? We are not asked to build this life of love in our own strength. The God who created all mankind, and brought Jesus back from the dead, is at work in you, working "that which is well pleasing in his sight." (v. 21).

Conclusion

The Epistle to the Hebrews explains in theological terms how Jesus is superior to the angels, the old covenant ways, and the temple sacrifices. As Hebrews reaches its final chapter, the theology shifts to a list of commands on how we need to live our life, and who we need to focus on. The list of commands in

Hebrews 13 can feel overwhelming if presented as a legalistic checklist but is less daunting if we anchor every ethical command (hospitality, service, purity, and contentment) back into God's promises in verses 5 and 8. *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. (v.5) Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.” (v.8)*

We do these things and act in this manner because we are totally secure in Him. This is the lesson I needed to learn when I was sitting in that booth and when I struggled with submitting to Jesus who had me on the Potter's wheel. I grew up loving high liturgy, proper church, the creeds, and deep theology, but wondered how it applied to my life, my marriage, my struggles and all the neighbors I was judgmental of. In this church season of Trinity, we focus on Christian formation, ethics, and living out our baptismal identity but we also need to be cognizant of the practical struggles of daily life. Hebrews 13 tells us that true worship is not just what we do inside the walls of the church; it is how we love our neighbors and whose promises we cling to for strength when we feel hopeless and lost.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.