


“Change in Perspective”
Sunday, August 28, 2016
15th Sunday after Pentecost

 **(Hebrews 13:1-8, [15-16], NRSV)**

Service Well-Pleasing to God

Let mutual love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Remember 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.

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

Keep 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.*”

So we can say with confidence,

“The Lord is my helper;

I will not be afraid.

What can anyone do to me?”

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

[Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.]

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

[2nd Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

“A lawyer once asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life. ‘*Eternal Life*’ then did not mean

life that went on and on. It meant life that really mattered and so endured.” (Bosch, Frederich, *Feasting on the Word*, Y-C, V-4, P-15)

Many of us are familiar with this conversation as we realize it is what leads Jesus to tell the parable of The Good Samaritan in Luke 10.

Jesus used that story to change the lawyer’s perspective; to help him see what it means to love God and neighbor.

In today’s reading, the author points out several things as he tries to focus the people on living a good life that pleases God.

This involves some simple reminders about God’s perspective.

There is much for us to consider here as well.

Let us pray...Lord, today you ask us to change our perspective so that we might better see things as you see them. Help us to notice what breaks your heart in the world and how we might be able to follow you into those places where you are needed most. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

For me, the idea that this text might be about changing perspective comes in the 2nd verse:

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

There is an obvious connection between this challenge and a story those First Century believers would know very well: The story of Abraham and Sarah.

Three men were traveling near their camp and Abraham invited them to stop and rest.

He went out of his way to provide shade, food, and water for the travelers.

In the end, the men were messengers from God (*angels*) who announced that, even in their old age, Abraham and Sarah would finally have the son they so desired.

The concept of **radical hospitality** was part of their way of life.

In those days most people lived a somewhat nomadic lifestyle.

They travelled with their herds and flocks,
following the seasons and the food supply.

They often depended on the hospitality of strangers
for their survival.

**The writer of Hebrews challenges the church to
use their shared understanding of hospitality
to expand their perspective and imagine what
else God may have in mind.**

Though we have heard the many biblical references to
showing hospitality to strangers;
we've heard Jesus teach on love of neighbor and
Good Samaritans and such;
yet, most of us are hesitant to really live-out the
idea of welcome for strangers.

We teach our children not to talk to strangers;
sadly, this is necessary in the real world
of child predators.

But, as adults we continue to be wary and even
suspicious of strangers.

We have our neighborhood watch groups and our
home surveillance cameras.

We are quick to “*profile*” others based on our particular biases about what danger looks like.

We have become paranoid and isolationist in many ways.

Through all of this we must **lean in** to God’s perspective and temper our caution with hospitality.

Beyond the Good Samaritan story, we must also recall that Jesus told us to “*invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind*” to lunch or dinner (Luke 14:12-14).

In fact, the Bible is filled with reminders to care for the poor, widows, orphans, and strangers in our midst.

This is not always easy when we mostly want to entertain our relatives or a few likable neighbors.

Perhaps our new perspective here has to do with radical hospitality toward migrant peoples and refugees fleeing oppressive regimes.

Surely, as Americans, we realize that most of us have our origins someplace else.

Our ancestors migrated here from somewhere else in search of freedom and opportunity.

Surely we remember the Pilgrims and the Native Americans.

Hospitality made this country possible.

Maybe that is a change in perspective for us as we confront complex immigration policies while balancing sensible security concerns.

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.”

“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them.”

By some estimates, more than 2.4 million people are incarcerated in the U.S.

- Nearly half a million of these are awaiting trial, not yet convicted of any crime.

- Oklahoma ranks in the top three states in terms of incarceration rates.

Studies indicate that the high rate of U.S. incarceration is directly related to such initiative as: “*The War on Drugs*”, “*Zero Tolerance*”, and “*Tough on Crime*” – Initiatives intended to lower crime rates.

In hind-sight, these initiatives had little impact on crime in America.

The Oklahoma County Jail was built in 1991 to house 1200 inmates; today it houses 2500.

Now, imagine yourself inside the Oklahoma County Jail or the Tulsa County Jail, or Avalon, or any other part of the U.C. prison system.

I have visited some of these places and your imagination can’t actually be enough.

Maybe you deserve to be there, maybe you don’t.

Either way, imagine living in over-crowded conditions with strangers, bad food, no privacy, and plenty of hostility.

Imagine knowing you are innocent, as in the case of the man just released after 25 years served for a crime he did not commit.

Imagine knowing you are guilty, but remorseful – wanting to repent and learn to do better.

Imagine what you might need from someone on the outside who claims to follow Jesus.

What might it look like for us to really listen and take action when we hear: ***“Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them?”***

After **that** difficult exercise we are challenged to remember: ***“those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves are being tortured.”***

WOW! No matter your personal feelings about this issue, clearly the Bible wants us to think of it from God’s perspective.

Does **any end** justify the extraordinary means that tortures another human being?

Can God abide the act of one created being intentionally inflicting pain on another created being to secure cooperation or information?

If we take this Scripture passage seriously we should all be joining organizations that would help us identify in an empathic way with victims of torture, whether they are in Guantanamo Bay or Beijing; in North Korea or Nigeria.

This seems to say that torture is **never OK**, no matter whose side you are on.

I believe that these issues and the others raised in this reading are examples of how we are intended to live in community; to live a life that matters and so endures.

We learn to love and serve in community with one another and with the rest of the world.

We seek to be disciples who ***“do good and share what you have”*** so we can say with confidence: ***“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.”***
(Vs 6; cf Ps 118:6)

The best model for mutual love and service is Jesus
Chris who *“is the same yesterday and today and
forever.”*

“The sanctifying grace of God shaped the souls of
early Methodists as they learned in community.
One cannot learn patience, kindness, gentleness,
forgiveness, grace, and love by oneself. As the
Spirit deepens our interior lives, we learn to see the
world through God’s eyes. We discover that God
also invites us to see the world through the eyes of
those who suffer and who are in need – *“as though
you yourself were being tortured”*.”

(The Wesley Study Bible, page 1496: Life
Application Topic – *Service*)

👉 Our task as Christians is to see the world, *as best we can*, as God sees it and work to change our perspective so that we might be the hands and feet of Christ in the world.

Too often, we see things through our own eyes and miss opportunities to do mission and ministry in Jesus' name.

This morning let's work on expanding our perspective and deciding to change it so we might see more of what God wants us to see and less of what is easy for *us* to want to see instead.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**