

ENDURANCE AND PEACE

WHEN THE FIRST CANDLE OF THE ADVENT WREATH WAS LIT LAST SUNDAY IT REPRESENTED FAITH, AND NOW THE SECOND CANDLE HAS BEEN LIT, THE CANDLE OF PREPARATION. **HOW CAN WE PREPARE FOR JESUS IF WE DON'T HAVE FAITH?** IT WAS FAITH AND A HOPE IN THE PROMISE OF GOD THAT KEPT THE JEWS IN ANTICIPATION OF THE MESSIAH. THEY HAD ENDURED YEARS OF WANDERING, WAITING AND OCCUPATION. **WHAT HAVE YOU ENDURED THIS YEAR?** NO MATTER WHAT IT HAS BEEN, YOU SIT HERE THIS MORNING IN GOD'S PRESENCE! HE HAS BEEN FAITHFUL TO US AND BEEN THERE THROUGH IT ALL – THE GOOD AND THE NOT SO GOOD.

IN 1 Corinthians 10:13 *"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation He will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to **endure** it."* DOUBT MAY HAVE CREPT IN AT TIMES HAVING US WONDERING WHY OR HOW LONG, BUT GOD WAS THERE ALL THE TIME! IN ROMANS 5:28 IT SAYS *"And we **know** that for those who love God all things work together for good..."* WHEN WE KNOW GOD IS FAITHFUL, WE, WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, CAN ENDURE AND IN THE PROCESS RECEIVE WHAT GOD HAS FOR US.

THIS ADVENT SEASON, GOD IS HERE AND HIS DESIRE IS FOR US TO PREPARE FOR THE BIRTH OF HIS SON ONCE AGAIN, AND TO RECEIVE JESUS, THE REAL GIFT OF CHRISTMAS, IN A NEW WAY. **HOW DO WE DO THAT?** IN PHILIPPIANS 4:7 TELLS US *"Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* THE MESSAGE ENDS THIS VERSE LIKE THIS *"It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."* FAITH AND HOPE COMBINE TO HELP US WITH PREPARATIONS FOR ADVENT SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE JESUS ANEW AND HAVE THAT PEACE PROMISED TO US!

THE QUESTION IS HOW DO WE USE OUR "TOOLS" OF FAITH AND HOPE TO PREPARE? THERE WAS A MAN WHO WROTE A BOOK AWHILE BACK "7 HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE". **THE BOOK TOLD OF HABITS THAT MAKE PEOPLE SUCCESSFUL AND COULD CREATE STRONG FAMILIES. I THOUGHT "AREN'T WE A FAMILY, THE FAMILY OF GOD?"** THEN LOOKING AT TODAY'S NEW TESTAMENT READING IN ROMANS THERE ARE "HABITS" WE CAN DEVELOP DURING ADVENT TO CREATE AN EVEN STRONGER FAMILY HERE AT CENTENNIAL! IT BEGINS WITH FAITH AND HOPE, BUT THEN WE MUST ENDURE TO SEE THINGS THROUGH TO COMPLETION , A LIFE LONG PROCESS OF "BECOMING" MORE CHRIST-LIKE.

THE FIRST "HABIT" IS IN VERSES 1 AND 2 – CONSIDERATION FOR EACH OTHER. PAUL USES THE WORD "STRONG AND WEAK", MEANING IN THE FAITH. THAT WE SHOULD CONSIDER WHETHER WE ARE BUILDING UP THOSE WEAKER OR SAY "NEWER IN THE FAITH" AND NOT JUST SEEKING TO SATISFY OURSELVES. **EVERYONE OF US NEEDS THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF OTHERS IN THE FAMILY HERE AT CENTENNIAL. A QUESTION WE MIGHT ASK OF OURSELVES IS "DO PEOPLE COME TO ME FOR ADVICE ABOUT FAITH OR WHEN THEY DO, DO I LOOK AT THEM AS WEAK AND TEND TO JUDGE THEIR WEAKNESSES?"**

THERE IS A TENDENCY BY US ALL TO ASSUME EVERYONE AROUND US KNOWS THINGS ABOUT THE FAITH OR THE CHURCH OR THE WAY A COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS. **HOW DO WE REACT TO A QUESTION BY SOMEONE AND WHAT IS OUR REACTION TO WHY DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT? OR WHY ARE THEY EVEN ASKING THAT QUESTION!**

IF THERE IS ONE THING I TOOK AWAY FROM MY COLLEGE DAYS WAS THAT NEVER, EVER BE HESITANT TO ASK A QUESTION, BECAUSE NOT EVERYBODY IN THE ROOM UNDERSTANDS IT EITHER!

THE SECOND “HABIT” IS TO DEVELOP A STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES. VERSE 4 CLEARLY TELLS US THAT SCRIPTURE WAS WRITTEN FOR OUR INSTRUCTION. THAT THROUGH PERSEVERANCE AND ENDURANCE AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE SCRIPTURES WE MAY HAVE HOPE. **NO ONE EVER GOT BETTER AT SOMETHING WITHOUT HARD WORK AND STUDY. IF WE ARE TO GROW AND BECOME STRONGER IN OUR FAITH SO THAT WE CAN HELP OTHERS WE MUST ESTABLISH A PLAN TO STUDY THE SCRIPTURES.** WHEN WE HAVE SCRIPTURES IN OUR HEAD AND HEART THEN WE CAN PRACTICE THE VERSE FROM EPHESIANS 4:29 *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is **good for edification** according to the need of the moment that it may give grace to those who hear it”* THE MESSAGE SAYS AT THE END OF VERSE 29 *“Say only what helps, each **word a gift.**”* OR PROVERBS 25:11 *“A word spoken at the right time is like gold apples on a silver tray.”* WOULDN'T THIS WORLD BE SO MUCH BETTER A PLACE IF WE PRACTICED THIS? THERE IS AN OLD SAYING THAT OUR MOTHERS TAUGHT US ALL- *“IF YOU CAN'T SAY SOMETHING NICE, DON'T SAY IT AT ALL”* HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE NOT REMEMBERED THOSE WORDS OF OUR MOTHERS? SUCH A SMALL GESTURE IS A HUGE BUILDING BLOCK FOR A “SUCCESSFUL” FAMILY OF GOD.

THE THIRD “HABIT” IS THAT OF ENDURANCE OR AS THE BIBLE SAYS IT MANY TIMES BEING STEADFAST IN VERSE 4 ENDURANCE IS THAT KEY ELEMENT THAT CARRIES US THROUGH CIRCUMSTANCES, NO MATTER WHAT THEY ARE LIKE AT THE TIME. JUST BECAUSE WE DON'T ALWAYS AGREE DOESN'T MEAN WE WALK AWAY FROM EACH OTHER. THE REWARDS OF ENDURING AND HAVING MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS FAR OUT WEIGH ANY TEMPORARY BUMPS IN THE ROAD. PAUL TALKS OF THE RACE WE RUN AND HOW WE ARE TO PRESS ON FOR THE PRIZE. OUR “FAMILY” HERE AT CENTENNIAL WILL BE BETTER FOR IT IF WE ALL DEVELOP ENDURANCE AND MOVE FORWARD.

THE FOURTH “HABIT” IS THAT OF HOPE AS STATED IN VERSE 4. WE ARE REALISTS, BUT NEVER EVER BE A PESSIMIST! WE MAY ENDURE DIFFERENCES, DIFFICULTIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS AND EVEN HARDSHIPS, BUT WE KNOW BECAUSE OF FAITH, GOD IS THERE THROUGH IT ALL AND THAT SHOULD GIVE US ALL HOPE! IT LIVES WITHIN US, GOD-INSPIRED. WE SHOULD VIEW OUR “FAMILY” HERE AS A GLASS HALF FULL NOT HALF EMPTY.

THE FIFTH “HABIT” IS HARMONY FOUND IN VERSE 5. ANOTHER WORD MAYBE “UNITY”. AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE UNITY DOES NOT MEAN UNIFORMITY. WE ARE INDIVIDUALS AND THINK AND SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY AND THAT'S OKAY. THINK OF YOUR OWN FAMILY, EVERYONE SO DIFFERENT – PERSONALITY AND ALL, BUT YOU ALL LIVE UNDER THE SAME ROOF, NOT UNLIKE THE FAMILY HERE AT CENTENNIAL.

There was a story of a church that had to make the difficult decision about cutting down a big shade tree in the parking lot. One older man argued long that they preserve that tree, but the decision went the other way. On the day they cut it down he was the first one to show up. Someone said, “I thought you didn't want that tree cut down.” He said, “I don't, but WE decided to cut it down, so I'm here to help.” That is working in harmony. GOD KNOWS WE CAN ACCOMPLISH MORE IN MINISTRY AND IN THIS COMMUNITY IN WHICH WE LIVE IF WE LIVE IN HARMONY. ROMANS 12:18 “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

A SIXTH "HABIT" IS PRAISE EXPLAINED IN VERSE 6, "That with one accord, you may with one voice glorify or praise God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." WE COME TO SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP, SOME WITH JOY READY TO LIFT PRAISE TO GOD AND OTHERS COME DRAGGING EMPTY BUCKETS READY TO BE FILLED, BUT WE ALL RAISE, IN ONE VOICE PRAISE TO GOD IN THIS HOUR OF WORSHIP, BECAUSE HE IS WORTHY OF IT!!! WE COME TO GIVE HIM THE PRAISE BECAUSE AS THE PRAISE SONG SAYS "GOD IS GOOD HE IS SO GOOD TO ME"

THE LAST "HABIT" NUMBER 7 IS FOLLOWING THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS FOUND VERSE 7. WE ARE HIS DISCIPLES AND DISCIPLES FOLLOW AND EMULATE THE TEACHINGS OF THEIR TEACHER. IN FOLLOWING HIS EXAMPLE WE ARE TO ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER. VERSE 7 SAYS "*Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.*" WE CAN PRAISE GOD IN MANY WAYS THROUGH SONG, PRAYER AND ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER, FAULTS AND ALL. I THINK I WOULD ADD SOME WORDS AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS VERSE SAYING SOMETHING LIKE "*REMEMBER HOW HE ACCEPTED AND LOVED YOU RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE, JUST AS YOU ARE*". IT IS A HABIT THAT WILL BUILD A STRONG FAMILY HERE AT CENTENNIAL - "*TO BE A CARING FAMILY OF DISCIPLES WHO KNOW CHRIST AND MAKE CHRIST KNOWN IN THE COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE WORLD*". PEOPLE WILL TAKE NOTICE.

Someone has said that believers are like grains of wheat being ground together to make bread. Each ingredient contributes something to the final loaf. In fact, the final product looks and tastes nothing like the separate ingredients. Maybe we can think of these seven habits as a 7-grain bread like we sometimes buy. In the church, members show consideration for each other. We study the scriptures together. We endure to the end with the hope that God inspires. We live in harmony as we praise our God. And as we follow Jesus, we become kneaded into this fellowship of faith.

DURING THIS ADVENT SEASON, A TIME OF PREPARATION, MAY WE KEEP THE FAITH AND HOPE IN ORDER TO ENDURE AND FIND THE PEACE ONLY GOD CAN GIVE US. AMEN