

Sermon - John 10:11-16 I John 3:16-24 May 3, 2009

Such Love for Us - Amazing

In hard times – very very hard times – when Christians were in fear of their lives, the writers of John, and the first Letter of John, both, gave witness to a spirit – not of fear, but of abiding, life affirming, faith. In the words we just read the writer declares – By this we know that God abides in us – by the Spirit that he has given us.

It is that same spirit – the spirit of the living Christ - that has been at work in our lives – that has drawn us to this place – again and again – and this morning. And in the sacraments we celebrate this day, may we be reminded, in this very very hard time, of the Spirit that dwells in us – a spirit not of fear, but of faith.

Please pray with me...

Lord, light of our lives, love that never fails, may the words of my mouth, and the thoughts of these your loving and faithful people, be your good word to us this day, in Christ. Amen.

A shepherd's love. That's God's love for me, for you. A good shepherd's love. The good shepherd provides for us. We shall not want. We will have green pastures. Still waters. Paths of righteousness.

And he died for us so that we do not need to fear even the valley of the shadow of death. Such love for us. Amazing.

And it is amazing to me how the word, the news of this love, can turn people's lives upside down. Can give people without any worldly hope, great hope and great energy for life.

On a mountain top in South Africa, just two weeks ago, I listened as a young man I had preached to 4 years ago, preached to me about God's love in Christ. How he has grown in faith – and now he is studying to be a preacher.

And he preached to his own Zulu people, most of whom were less than 25 years old. He preached about God's great love, and about God's call to love God and to love one another. And – in a country with 250,000 AIDS orphans, children whose parents are dead from AIDS, the very situation for some of the young people to whom he was preaching, the young man spoke about what God's love offers – and demands.

How God's love offers strength and hope for life that is good and wonder-full now in even the hardest of times, and forever, and how it demands obedience to Christ's way and Christ's truth.

He called his fellow young people to live lives of faithfulness. Because if they could and if they would they would be safe from the disease that is ravaging so many lives and communities. And I was amazed – all over again – at the power of God's Good News to change people's lives,

2 to give people hope in the hardest of times.

20 years ago in South Africa, I could not have worshipped openly with the Zulu people. But now – through the faith and courage of people like Bishop Tutu, and Nelson Mandela, 2 weeks ago I worshipped openly with God's people there.

The faith that the white colonizers brought to Africa, faith in Jesus Christ who declared God's love for all people, the Zulu people came to believe, and they came to know God's presence in their lives, and a spirit of faith God gave them. A longing for their dignity and worth as children of God.

I was, I have been again, I still am amazed at what power the Good News of God's love in Christ has in people's lives, what a change it can make in how people live. God is love. Jesus loves us. We ought to love one another. And we can do this through him who loves us and strengthens us.

Amazing. This good news changed people's lives in Cameroon. And Dr. Paul and Edith Mobit and their family and friends are witnesses to the power of faith. The people whom we helped to build a Church in Xpujil, Mexico, are witnesses to the power of faith.

The people who help house the homeless and feed the hungry in Detroit and Pontiac are witnesses to the power of this message of God's love. You, you are witnesses to the amazing power of God's love, for down the years, you, the members of OLCC,P, now and for years before, have given evidence to the power of faith in Christ as you've maintained the ministry and mission of this Church in good times and bad.

You've helped make, I hope, a better believer out of me, as you've allowed Mary and I the opportunity to be in ministry with you.

And through this ministry together, you've allowed us to see faith at work. Faith at work in this community – addictions faced and conquered. Loved ones lost, but honored and remembered. A sharing spirit encouraged. Care for others practiced. Help for others offered. Faith at work in Pontiac and Detroit, in Mississippi and Mexico and Honduras and Africa.

You've let me see in you, with you, what God's love for us and in us can do. And all of this, has led Mary and I to reach a decision about the part we want to play in the future of your ministry here.

It was on that Mountain in South Africa that it became clear to me. And it was a communion service. The offering was received. As it will be here. And I had my gift ready to give - I thought - a pretty good sized South African Rand note.

Then I saw the offering basket that was being passed to me – the first American to give.

There were Rand notes in the basket much larger than the one in my hand – and they had come from people, some of whom still live in Rondavaals, round stone houses with grass roofs. And I was embarrassed by the faith of those people. And it helped with the decision Mary and I were being led to make.

Very soon – God willing – you will be calling a new pastor, and I will shortly afterwards, retire. And when I do, by Presbyterian practice, Mary and I will no longer be permitted to have any formal connection with this Church... we will need to go elsewhere.

Except – I've been told we can still give you money. That must have something to do with our Scottish heritage. And that's what Mary and I will do. We are not yet sure how we will do it – because we've noticed some changes in our retirement funds, and the value of our home - and the changes were not exactly - up. More like Tiger pitching era.

But we trust the words of I John, We know God abides in us by the spirit God has given us – and it is a spirit of faith and not fear.

So – we have grounded our thinking in gratitude for the blessings we have received by being a part of this Church, part of you. We've prayed about what to do. And in faith – not knowing quite how we will do it – we will be pledging to the next campaign – the same as we did to the current campaign - 25, 000 over the next 3 years.

We may be down, we Michigan folk. But we are a people of faith and not fear. And faith not r will triumph. So – with deep gratitude, in prayer and faith, we will give because we can.... To what will be your church, not ours. But yes, Christ's.

Some can and will and should be able to share more. Some, many, will not be able to share as much. Each of us can only give out of what we ourselves have received - and God understands that - God provides the measure of wealth I need. We need.

I simply hope that all of us will walk through the three steps... three steps we should follow for any decision in our lives. What are we grateful for? How has God blessed us? Pray God, what should we do with what we've been given? In faith, what kind of blessing can we be for others.

And if we do this – I know, I know, what ever we then do will be the right thing, the faithful thing, and good enough...and more.

As I said. I don't know how it happens. But it does. The Good News of God's great love for us – when that good news is heard – it changes life and it changes lives. It is the promise given in the Sacraments of our Church – of Baptism – where we celebrated the faith of the Mobit family, and our faith, in God's call to us to new life in Christ.

And of this table where see again the wonder of our faith, of our being servants to one another – you caring for and serving me, and I caring for and serving you. You’ve heard the Good News. That Jesus is our Good Shepherd, and loves us now and always, and calls us to be witnesses to his love in all we do and say and are.

May this Good News give you great hope even in these hard times - hope by which to live and grow in your love for God. Amen.

David W. Robertson, Pastor