

Devotions – July 11 - 17, 2021
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Sunday, July 11, 2021

Text: I Corinthians 13:13

Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

This week, in your time of prayer and devotion, use this familiar verse of I Corinthians 13:13; let it surround you. Paul offers us a catchy reminder of what we have been provided; our faith, so that we can live in hope which culminates in actions that find their source in love. These three are tied together, working as a unit, dependent upon each other and enhancing and reinforcing the impact of each.

As you focus on your day think about how your faith in Jesus, as your Lord and Savior, can speak and support those tasks on today's agenda. Does that change and inform how you approach your friends or the visitors at church, the clerk at the store, the neighbor across the yard, the children under your care? Put your trust in Jesus to provide what you need; after all those individuals you encounter need your patience and they search for someone with an understanding heart. If you are alone today, can faith touch you with the reality of Christ's presence with you? So you really are not so alone.

We often let our troubling situations diminish our hopefulness and spoil our relationships. We can come to realize that it is necessary for us to build on the hope that emerges when we trust in the Lord. Then the love that we can give is enabled by the heart-filling support of faith and hope. Perhaps that is why love is the greatest for it comes about as it has been built upon by that combination of faith and hope.

Faith, hope, and love are meant to dwell together for they are mutually beneficial. Rather like a triune affiliation that makes each part better. Enjoy the gift of each and hold them close, utilizing them throughout the day.

Prayer: *Lord God, direct my heart toward your will for me. Keep me from judgmental attitudes but have me look with honesty at my own self. Fill me with your Spirit so I can appreciate the gifts that are mine. Open my eyes to those who need to experience the love that is mine, that finds its source in you, my Lord. Amen*



Monday, July 12, 2021

FAITH

Text: Romans 1:17

The righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

To live by faith, to put one's trust in God, is the way to stay on the right side of God (to be righteous). We know we don't want to be on God's wrong side, we have enough troubles. But to live by faith may sound like we are not engaging our brains, like we just go through life without thinking things through in a thorough and careful manner. Yet faith does not preclude setting goals and working toward their achievement. Faith, rather, brings an acceptance that one does not have to do that work alone and without guidance and support. As one relies on faith the strength of that gift will grow.

Today as you make your plans and decide how to spend your time, put your faith into action. Consider how what you do can be a reflection of your faith in Christ. Might it change or tweak the way you go about things? Anticipate how your day will become a better one as you are more attentive to the use of the gifts you have received from the Spirit. If you know that you will be encountering a certain individual this day, one that you don't always deal with well, how can you prepare your heart and thoughts so this time the meeting will be different, a more positive one? Hebrews 11:1 speaks about the positive influence faith can give us. **¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** As you move into today realize it is your faith that provides you assurance and conviction, just what you need to accomplish good things.

Prayer: *Dear Redeemer, you provide more than I realize so that my life can be full and satisfying. Give me the support I need so I have the confidence to go forward to accomplish that which needs doing. Teach me to rely upon you, leaving fear and anxiety behind, and taking on this new day with assurance and calm. Upheld by your name, Amen.*



Tuesday, July 13, 2021

HOPE

Text: Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are you one of those people to whom hope is automatic, an optimist by nature? Or are you someone for whom hope is rare; is it something that needs to emerge as a done deal before you will even acknowledge it? So by then it is not really hope but has become accomplishment to be claimed. It is true that it can be very scary to hope. To rely on unproven possibilities and to trust in a favorable outcome, when we have had greater experience with the downside, is a formidable challenge.

Review for yourself a hope that you currently hold close in your heart. It can be something very personal or it may be a desire directed with a larger focus. Have you discussed your concerns or this need with God? If not, can you do so now? Why does the voicing of our thoughts and fears, before God or to a friend, help clarify them?

Let the struggle expressed by the psalmists direct your thoughts. Psalm 43:5 - **Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God.** What does this tell you about the one who wrote these words? Look for some new insight for your own situation and dreams for the future. In what ways are you being directed? Identify your own disquiet. Do you hear the advice that is given? So give it a try!

Psalm 33:21b-22 - **Because we trust in (your) holy name, let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us, even as we hope in you.** Perhaps you notice a strong resemblance between these words and the theme verse of this week, from I Corinthians 13. That combination of the three, faith (trust), hope, and love, are tied together here. Since we believe and know we can trust in the power of the Name, we can open ourselves up to the love the Lord has for us. We don't need to be afraid that our expectations will be crushed, for in God there is hope.

The verse from Romans, that began this reflection, brings a positive tone and confident promise. Read it again. May its encouragement fill you; for the very power of God's Spirit is being made accessible to bring direction for your day, for your life.

Prayer: Guiding Spirit, show me how to hope in you. Make me aware of the uncertainties in me that interfere with putting my hope in the One who saves. Clarify my thoughts and help me put aside that which brings worry so I can dream of possibilities that will bring renewal. Amen



Wednesday, July 14, 2021

LOVE

We have quite a time with this word – love. It has a reputation as the most exquisite of feelings, an emotion that we strive to feel, expecting it to carry its own rewards. What comes to mind

when you think about love? Your age and life experience may change how you look at love and what comes to mind. You may think about babies and the love they receive and give. The love that is generated by grandchildren is often different from what you felt and how you expressed that love for your own children. You may have made a commitment to love a special person, which is different from the love you have for a career or hobby. We all seem to love our pets with great enthusiasm. There are instances when objects receive a dedication that can only be termed as love – those collectibles, that house, those toys. No matter how love is understood and communicated, love has a focus.

From our faith perspective we accept that God loves us and we have heard that God is love. Without the loving aspect of God, we certainly would not be comfortable having a relationship with the Almighty; fear would be the only sensible response. For us, it would be just like Adam and Eve in the Garden, we would try to hide away. Yet, as we are connected to Jesus, we learn that love demonstrates itself with such compassion and care that even the sacrifice of life was not beyond giving. The sacrifice which Jesus gave has become the benchmark by which we learn the true extent of the power of love.

As a result of the love of Christ, we discover that for God the focus of love becomes a matter of obedience. John wrote of this. ¹²**This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** ¹³**No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.** ¹⁴**You are my friends if you do what I command you.** ¹⁷**I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another** (John 15:12-14,17). We are to base our love on the love which Jesus demonstrated and gives to us. In our obedience and by our imitation of Jesus our relationship with Christ is that of friends. Friends that hang out together tend to take up the same characteristics. And so we become defined by the same love. We get to know who we can be, who we are meant to be, who we are. ³⁴**I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.** ³⁵**By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"** (John 13:34-35). Our witness is an accurate one as love motivates our words and actions with one another. Rejoice in this love.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, teach me how to love, as you love. Fill me with such gratitude for your friendship that I gladly live in obedience to your command to love. Encourage me to bravely go forth each day, showing concrete evidence of Christ's love in my life. Amen*



Thursday, July 15, 2021

These Three

There is something about groups of three, the three Musketeers, the three Stooges, a triangle, our Triune God. In I Corinthians 13 we have these three: faith, hope, and love, united. Perhaps like a three-legged stool there is balance and strength with the three put together. Each builds on the support of the others and if any one of them goes missing the others will be diminished and may also vanish. Faith brings with it the hope one needs to move forward, then love is what gets expressed with the activity of faith. The interdependence of these three is useful to keep in mind as you choose your life direction and make decisions for your day. They are there, working in the background as your emotions and intellect are operating in the forefront. We may not usually think about them at all, just take them for granted. They do seem to function very much like that three-legged stool; it is there holding us up, keeping us balanced and steady, but not noticed until we slide off and fall to the ground. We actually do need then, to attend to that stool, making sure it is sitting on a level place and that each leg remains in good shape. Our stool is to be placed on a sure foundation, a level grounding – Christ, our Lord. Each of the legs requires maintenance so it doesn't rot away. The Word of God, the community of believers, and serving in ministry are together the restoratives that keep the legs whole and strong.

I Cor 13:13a Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three.

These three abide, they abide (dwell) together. Living together, day in and day out, gets them completely acquainted with each other's strengths and weaknesses. Then one part can compensate for another, and one part can complement another; all will benefit. They grow together, just like families will grow in strength, as long as each one is getting the needed attention, the whole experiences the gain.

Have you known the benefit of a group of three? Naturally there can be a downside, which happens when the balance gets disrupted. For instance, when competition arises and one wants more than their share, or if two join forces against the third, then the whole will fall apart. Consider today how these three work together and make your life better.

Prayer: *Come, O Lord, find me this day and fill me with faith, hope, and love. Give me balance in my life. Show me how to attend to each aspect of my relationship with you so I can fulfill my potential and bring a loving witness to those around me. In Jesus name, Amen.*



Friday, July 16, 2021

The Greatest of These is Love

Yesterday we did consider that an imbalance between the three - faith, hope, and love - could be disastrous. Yet now we hear that love is the greatest. We may want to take into account that love will never be great unless faith and hope are there backing it up. Love certainly has the

greatest public awareness, a wider market appeal and recognition, as it were. Consider the advice we receive from I Corinthians 16:13-14. **¹³Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. ¹⁴Let all that you do, be done in love.** Paul, here, is wrapping up his letter, concluding his teaching, his advice, and his directives to the people, to this young, struggling, challenged, yet strong and growing church. In summation he emphasizes, one more time, the encouragement he has been getting at throughout his instructions to them. In ALL you do, in everything you strive to achieve, it will happen as long as it is done in love.

First and foremost, the make it or break it ingredient is love. When it comes to serving others, when it is a matter of sharing your witness, it is your love that will make whatever gift you share a palatable and welcome one. The love that is evident in you will enhance your sincerity and make you believable and trustworthy. Faith and hope are yours, as they are working in you, then you become courageous and strong. It is love that reaches out and touches others. As Paul urges us, we are to strive for the greatest – for the love, which is to be utilized on behalf of others, for the life-changing, transforming power that love brings to a situation. Love indicates that you are “all-in”, your dedication and commitment are fully engaged. Love compels us and is compelling to those who receive it. So the gift of love generates more of the same, from the giver and receiver, so then it spreads. Love is contagious, a very good kind of virus. Try it and see.

Prayer: Blowing Spirit, send me the love bug, that I might spread it to others and pass along the greatest of gifts. Inspire me by faith and with hope that love can and will overcome our distrust and despair to bring us into unity with one another. By the witness of the ministry of Christ’s church may the world know the greatest message, your love for us. Amen



Saturday, July 17, 2021

Text: I Corinthians 13:13

Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love.

So we have come full circle and end this week where we began, as far as this Scriptural direction is concerned. Have you lived with this verse for these seven days and has it spoken to you, given you any new insights or provided inspiration? At this point, how are you understanding the faith that you have been given? Where do you place your reliance and how has that been going for you? Are there changes that you want or need to make in who or what you place your trust? How will you go about making the changes and who will hold you accountable?

Are you feeling a full portion of hopefulness or have doubt and troubles diminished your capacity for letting hope come to life? Do you notice that it is easier to find hope, just by putting hope on your radar? Where would you like to see hope strengthened so that you know you will

be able to count on it with greater confidence? Is there someone who (or an activity that) brings hope into your sphere and can you set aside more time for them?

The Beatles wrote a song, “All We Need is Love.” According to this Scripture that isn’t quite all that we need but it does have the number one slot. It would be a gift to the world if love was given a place of prime importance and yet it is rarely true. Over this last week, has love been on your mind and for what actions has it been the motivator? Have you recognized the interconnectedness that love has with faith and hope? Have you been confronted with any insight about yourself and how you express the love that is within you?

There is a children’s song that has true and guiding words for us, “This is my commandment that you love one another that your joy may be full.” God knows how love works in and through us, so may the greatest of these, love, be the impetus for your joy.

Prayer: Loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teach me your way of communicating in love and unity with one another, so that together we are stronger and enriched. May I hear your loving voice and respond in faith to your call. Let me see the hope that has been prepared for me to take up on a daily basis. Inspire me to show the love that the world needs so that all can prosper together. Abide with me, O Lord. Amen.

