

Don't Break the Chain  
Hebrews 13: 1-8 15-16

Americans have set aside this last weekend in August to recognize the social and economic achievements the working class has made in our country. Today is also Labor Sunday, a day the AFL first celebrated this to 1909 to recognize the spiritual accomplishments of the labor movement. That organization recognized that church does not end when the last hymn is sung, and the benediction is given. They recognized that people who were truly dedicated to serving and honoring Jesus Christ on Sunday would also do that in the workplace as well.

No matter our opinion of organized labor, one thing we can agree on is that they have a philosophy of caring for each member of the group. They believe that there is strength in numbers, and they strive to be unified as a group. They desire the best for every member of their organization, and they are not bashful about asking for things that will allow them to accomplish that goal. The voices of the weakest members are heard just as clearly as the most powerful. If you think about it, the 21<sup>st</sup> century church might learn a few things from these organizations, especially when it comes to unity and proclaiming our message.

Our scripture lesson today begins with a simple command: "Let mutual love continue". Mutual love is "love directed by each toward the other or the others". It implies reciprocity, or the idea that by showing love to someone they will be motivated to respond in kind. A slightly different rendering is found in the KJV - "Let brotherly love continue." The author of Hebrews uses the term brotherly love or in the ancient Greek Philadelphia to refer to the kind of love Christians have for other Christians. No matter which rendering we prefer the concept is the same. Both imply action and a relationship of some sort. Let mutual love *continue*. We are share the love that Jesus shared with us and *continue* to love others like Jesus loves us. It means we stick together, we don't break the chain. But what exactly does that mean? The writer of Hebrews tells us and describes mutual or brotherly love with six key principles.

The 1<sup>st</sup> principle is found in verse 2- “Don’t forget to show hospitality to strangers”. One of our motivations to love others like Jesus loves us is to encourage them to believe in Jesus. When we love others like Jesus loved us, we illustrate the message of the Gospel and bring glory to God. As we encounter others during our day to day activities one of the first things that should enter our minds is this- “I wonder if they know Jesus”? It is not an easy thing to do, especially if they look different than us, dress different than us, talk different than us, smell different than us or act different than us. Consider the implications of the latter part of this verse- by showing hospitality to strangers some have entertained angels without knowing it. It would be a sad thing for God to send an angel to us and we act like we are not interested in meeting them. We stick together when we show hospitality to strangers.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> principle is found in verse 3- remember those in prison. In this context the writer is referring not to criminals but those who are imprisoned for their faith. Even though Christianity is clearly under attack, we still enjoy so much liberty and religious freedom in this country that we may forget those who are suffering for their faith. Those who love to follow Jesus have undergone persecution since the days He walked this earth and will continue to endure it until He comes again. Mutual love is a compassionate love, having empathy for those suffering and doing whatever we can to alleviate their pain, sometimes at our own peril. We do this knowing some day we may be on the receiving end rather than the giving end. We stick together by remembering those persecuted for their faith.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> principle is found in verse 4- it has two parts. The first part is a reminder that marriage which was created, defined and given by God in Genesis 2:24 is for our benefit. Marriage is a good thing and contrary to some in the early church who taught otherwise single people are no more holy than married people, provided the second part is followed. The second part is a reminder to those who are married that mutual love is a faithful and honorable love, doing what we say we will do and living up to our promises. We stick together by keeping our promises.

Principle # 4 is a familiar one- keep your lives free from the love of money. Be content with what you have. Mutual love is unselfish love, loving people more than loving things. God demonstrates His love not by showering us with material things here on earth but by the promise of something much better to come in eternity. By His grace some have much, and others have little. Everything we have, including our earthly lives will eventually leave us. Only one thing will remain- the love that Jesus Christ has for us. We stick together when we are content with what God has given us.

Principle 5: Let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. Mutual love began when we first heard the Gospel and it must not stop with us. As we heard earlier, we can't break the chain. Just as someone shared the Good News with us, we in turn must share it with someone else. It doesn't matter if the date is 34AD or 2019 or 3960, the message and the reason for the message is the same. For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. We stick together by praising Jesus continually.

And number 6- the one you have been waiting for. Don't forget to do good and share what you have. That is more than a reminder to share our goods but a reminder to share the most important thing we have- the love of Christ. We stick together by sharing what God has given us. In the ultimate display of mutual love, Jesus Christ died for sinful people like you and me as well as those who resist His love. Sometimes those whom we are called to love may not respond likewise. But that must not discourage us or stop us from trying. Sometimes we may need to shake the dust from our feet and move on to more fertile ground. But we can't simply give up and allow the chain to break. We need to stick together. Amen