

SERMON: "THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT"
TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT PSALM 28
NEW TESTAMENT JOHN 13:31-35

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Building Dedication

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INTRODUCTION

We wrap up our series of sermons on our favorite bible passages this week
We've heard favorites from our elders and deacons and staff
Johnny paired the passages together by theme throughout this series
Except this week. This week we have passages from a married couple
The verses go together because they go together

Janelle Darst, our children's ministry coordinator chose Psalm 28, verse 7
Randy Darst, our communications coordinator picked John 13:34-35
There is not really a theme that ties their two passages together
They complement one another, but they're not necessarily from the same aisle
in the store. Whatever. I'll try and fit them together. It will be fun.

But why stop there? Let's add in the dedication of our new building.
Now that makes sermon preparation a bit more fun. It's like the joy I find
in cooking for Sunday Supper and shopping at the Food Bank.
Here are the three ingredients. Make something flavorful for 120 people.

We are still waiting on the COVID numbers to go down to start serving those meals again
(I'm looking forward to that) But here is my three ingredient mix for a sermon on ...
One - "The Lord is my strength and shield, in him my heart trusts"
Two - "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another ..."
And three - the dedication of our building improvements and extension

I think these three really do go together ... in order actually
We begin with what God has done for us. The Lord is our strength and shield.
That is what the psalmist said in the verse Janelle chose for us
It is a statement of fact included in the prayer of the psalmist
It is a foundational fact both in the psalm ... and in our lives.

Psalm 28 is a prayer. It is a prayer for help. We're familiar with those.
This is how the psalmist prays, verse two ...
"Hear the voice of my supplication as I cry to you for help"
We may not use the word supplication that much, but we get it
The psalmist is saying what we say "Lord, hear me. Lord, help me!"

That is the context of this statement of fact.
The person praying is leaning on and leaning into that truth
Whatever help they might have needed, they knew ...
They knew God was their strength and shield. So they trusted.

GROUNDING & GUIDED

I love how this verse, this statement of fact, comes amidst this person's prayers.
They make this prayer with confidence, trusting God ... because God is trustworthy.
We do what we do, whether it is to pray for help or take a leap of faith,
we do trusting that God hears us and helps us, our ground and our guide.

We had our first Theology Pub gathering this week.
We had to change plans because Singlespeed in Waterloo was closed
We looked around for somewhere in that area to meet and eat
We ended up at Basal Pizza on 4th. Good pizza, good sandwiches.

We were talking about where we have seen God through this pandemic
We talked about the things that have sustained us. Music, new hobbies to try, etc.
Johnny put the theological point on what has sustained us and does sustain us.
It is the fact that God is with us. God is our guide through the valley.

Sure we've had to adjust, some big adjustments like working from home.
Some small adjustments like finding another place to meet and eat
Still the foundational fact remains – God is our ground and guide, strength and shield.

The verse Janelle chose lays that foundation for us
Because of who God is and what God has done and is doing, we can ...
We can do any number of good things in response to God's goodness
That verse continues on the other side of the semi-colon ... **“so I am helped,
and my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him.”**

We've seen this in musicals and in our own lives
Sometimes, many times, the best response to good news is singing
That is a mighty fine response ... “with my song, I give thanks”
There are also plenty of other good responses to good news

Connecting a wife's favorite to a husband's, I'd connect that verse from the psalm
“so I am helped” to the verses from Randy about Jesus' giving us a mandate
a mandate to love as he has loved us – the eleventh commandment.
We read in John's gospel, from Jesus' last words to the disciples
before he was arrested and betrayed. He tells them. He tells us ...

**“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I
have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone
will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Randy and Janelle's chosen passages fit well together because
God's love, being our strength and shield, naturally leads to our love in response.
We love not just because Jesus told us to, commanded us to,
we do so because he first loved us. We love because we have been loved.

A MANDATE

This passage from John's gospel is one we normally hear on Maundy Thursday the Thursday of Holy Week because it is from that time before Jesus' death.

That day gets its name from this passage. "Maundy" is from the Latin word we translate into English as 'mandate' or in this translation, 'commandment.' So then, we might call that Thursday of Holy Week, "Love each other because it told you to' Thursday." And that mandate applies to all days.

This is a mandate, a commandment ... not just a suggestion.
We are to love one another, period. No excuses not to, no picking and choosing.
In other passages the circle is drawn as large as possible
Love your neighbor, love all your neighbors.

Here the circle is smaller and more particular. Love one another.
Jesus tells his disciples, the small group of people who have followed him day in and day out for three years, to love another.
That may seem easier. These people have a history together
Then again maybe it's tough in part because they have that history.

You ever done one of those extended family trips, maybe go out west for three weeks?
Was there ever a time you got on each other's nerves?
Maybe how long it takes your little brother to eat his fries, one at a time? Really?
How about three years together?

Maybe you'd get tired of Peter always being that guy - the one who raises his hand every time, the one always in the spotlight. Maybe you'd get tired of James and his brother John arguing amongst themselves? Maybe you'd get tired of worrying about Matthew, the former tax collector - something shady about that guy.

And then there is the fact that Jesus gives his followers this mandate not only after washing their feet, how humbling was that? But then he follows that with the news that one member of this small group would betray him?

Jesus gives them, gives us, this mandate to love knowing full well all these things
That there are tensions and jealousies and arguments amongst them
That they will frustrate one another, disappoint one another.
Jesus is telling us and them to love one another through all that
through the disappointments, through the frustrations, through the arguments

What Jesus is telling us to do, yes "do it because I said so" is not easy
But it is possible, necessary even. He tells us what we are to do
and he shows us how. He shows us what love looks like

You know this eleventh commandment, this mandate to love as Jesus has loved us
He tells them what to do *after* serving them, *after* washing their feet,
after giving them an example of what love looks like. Love looks like service.

SUMMARY

And what does service look like? Service has lots of looks

One of those looks is this new look building
and the reason behind the work we put into this 'leap of faith."
We didn't do all this work for ourselves. We didn't put in pews
with cupholders and a remote for the flat screen
Okay, we do have cupholders ... for communion cups

We did this work to build on the foundation of those who built this place
and built this place and people up into being "A Place for Everyone."
We repaired, replaced and repainted things that needed an update
Need to do that about every twenty years.

And the new things we did? We did those to expand our welcome mat.
We enlarged the Youth Room (tearing down that wall was fun)
We helped build a new church building, one that met code, in Bihembe, Rwanda
We spruced up the Three House Campus Ministry at UNI

And we added a new more accessible main entrance
We can now drop of people under the canopy out of the snow and rain
We now have an automatic opener for those who need assistance. We did not before.
We have now more places for those in wheelchairs - front, back and middle

We did this work, building up and out this home of peace and welcome
to be of service, to serve Jesus Christ by serving this community.
We did this work as an expression of love and as an act of and avenue for service.

I readily admit I started getting hungry before I went on study leave, back to NC and GA
I got to thinking about my favorite places to eat in Black Mountain
and Atlanta and Athens. Most of those places are a little funky, sketchy even
They're not the places where the person serving you says
"Good evening, my name is _____. I'll be your server. Tonight' specials are ..."

These places are little more down home. At the Varsity they say over and over again
"What do ya have? What do ya have?" At the Taco Stand, they're casual, "what's up?"
And at a barbecue place I heard my favorite greeting, short and sweet
The person looked at me and said with a bit of twang "Serve you?"

That is the message we are trying to send as we dedicate this building
As we dedicate ourselves anew to ministry together by showing
and sharing Christ's love saying to one another, to this community
and to the world God so loves ... "Serve you?"