

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2018

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Patience, Persistence, Perseverance

Based on Hebrews 10: 19-25

"Are you 'saved'?"

Aha! Got you squirming and I'm still at the first paragraph! Not generally an opening line we Presbyterians are likely to greet newcomers with at the front door. Not that it isn't an important conversation to have; rather that we would probably like to get to know the person a little bit, before we launch into something deep and personal. But to be fair, there are brothers and sisters of the faith of other denominations, some here in this city, to which that is the number one priority of worship, prayer and service: to ensure that all are 'safe in the arms of their Saviour' when the Day of Judgment arrives.

The writer of Hebrews penned with a similar kind of urgency. At a time in the early church's history, there was much uncertainty just under the cover of the hymnals. Years had passed since Jesus had walked the earth. In fact, it was now, a generation or two. In and around Jerusalem, the remaining disciples had regrouped, spread out, drawn

in more leadership, and were gaining new believers each week. Yet, they continued to struggle with people and places steeped in Jewish heritage. In the daily walk of believers, what things remained Jewish? What things became Christian? The church was growing, but moaning through growing pains as it did.

***Let us hold
unswervingly to
the hope we
profess, for he
who promised is
faithful. (v23)***

At the same time, working in far away places such as Corinth and Ephesus, the apostle Paul went about things completely differently. Today would likely call him 'a born again Christian.' Paul was filled with a televangelist's heart, and a vision to change the un-churched world. We know from Paul's letters in the Epistles, that his work was marked with success. But Paul struggled with growing pains as well, trying to keep faith communities on track. And

I'm not sure that leadership in Jerusalem was entirely sure how Paul's approach was going to mesh with theirs. (Not much different, in my opinion, as to the differing approaches of evangelical and mainline churches today.)

To complicate things all around, there was growing concern about the coming 'Day.' Perhaps you noticed as we read Verse 25 of the lesson, the word 'Day' begins with a capital letter. This 'Day' was somehow important. No, not a birth-day. No, not the day the mortgage came due. It was the 'Day' Christ was to return: the 'Day of Judgment.' It was thought, in the early days of the church, that Christ would return soon, very soon. As in: days or months, or perhaps a year or two at most. Yet, time and come and gone. Seasons had passed. Grandfathers had been buried, and still, Christ had not returned. Some fell away from the church, as mentioned by the writer of Hebrews (v25b). Others grew more anxious, trying to anticipate when and where this would happen. There was only one thing they could say about this coming 'Day': "You'd better be saved, or else!"

But nestled in Hebrews is more than just a thinly veiled warning of doom and gloom for those left behind in the trailing dust of Judgment Day, or for those just struggling to get through the every-day: The writer of Hebrews also offered this: "Hold tightly to hope." In fact, more than just 'hold tightly'; perhaps the better word is 'mightily!'

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (v23)

Perseverance.
Persistence.
Patience.

"Come close to God," Hebrews offers. "Set aside the mistakes. Hold tightly to hope. Serve well. Don't give up on the church. Encourage others."

Persevere at keeping God close, holding the hope that is ours for the taking, asking forgiveness when needed, accepting grace as it is given, serving Him to the best of your ability.

Persist at making the church an important part of your life, and encouraging others to come with you. Continue to be the pillar of strength to those who may be feeling fragile or anxious.

Patiently wait for God to direct your thoughts and actions. "Rome," they say, "was not built in a day." It will take time for the problems of

your world to resolve themselves: for the right comment to be shared, the right person to be in the right place at the right time. So be patient. And be ready to act when the time arrives.

Our church rhythm draws quickly to a close and a new season approaches. Already our heads have begun to turn, our thoughts more on Christmas preparations than on the Day of Judgment. But if the world were to end today, what would be the most important message, we as a faith community would like to share with the world:

"You'd better be 'saved'!"

OR

"Hold on to hope!"

I'm kind of leaning towards 'hope.' I expect that next Sunday, we will greet each other again for worship. But I do know, that for some in our community, the world of next Sunday will have completely changed from the world they are living this Sunday: devastating news, unwelcome reports at the doctor's office, family plans for the holidays falling through, the death of someone near and dear. There will be people in our midst, in dire need of the 'unswerving hope' of our Saviour.

May we be a faith community willing to walk with others as they journey through difficulties, dilemmas, or depression, and through our actions, and our attention, clearly leave them with the

message, "Hold on to hope!"
Persevere. Persist. Be patient.

*Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone*
~Rogers & Hammerstein