

**Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost – September 1, 2019**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Hebrews 13:1-8 (NIV)**

Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. 2) Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. 3) Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering. 4) Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5) Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6) So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" 7) Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. 8) **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.**

Dear friends in Christ:

It's the same old – same old. The same old thing; over and over again. Dull. Boring. That's often our reaction to something which never changes. That was the Israelites reaction to the manna God provided for them and you and I would probably react the very same way if we had to eat the very same thing every day, week after week, month after month, year after year. We may have our favorites but an occasional change of pace is usually welcome. Change and variety is good. Right?

So how about this for a change? After church you go out to the parking lot get in your car and turn the key expecting that your car will start the same old way it always does and surprise nothing happens. Change is good. Right? It's boring if the car starts every time – that's not what we say, is it? No we say, "It's reliable, dependable and trustworthy." The same old, same old can be positive too!

And that's what the writer of our text for today wanted to convey to us when he wrote: **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.** Because

**Theme:** Jesus Christ Is Always the Same

1. You can be assured that you can trust him to eternity
2. You can be glad that you can serve him here in time

When we consider what is at stake we realize the importance the unchanging nature of God. The apostle James helps us put things into perspective when he writes: (James 1:17) **Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**

Sadly we're often hurt by the fact that we and other human beings change. We think we know someone and suddenly they do something unexpected and hurtful. Sometimes we even surprise ourselves with our sinful actions. Sometimes the consequences of our thoughtless, careless and often sinful "changes" lead others to lose trust and confidence in us. Others may treat us with caution or worse they may try to retaliate against us.

How wonderful it is that our Savior does not change like shifting shadows. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. **God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6) So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?"**

In the past, God was with Jacob as he fled from his angry brother and went to work for his uncle Laban. He was with the ancient Israelites and their leader Joshua as they embarked on the conquest of the Promised

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Land. Those who initially received this letter were under pressure from family and government to renounce the Savior. In the face of this pressure they needed to be reminded that the worst that human beings could do to them would be to harm them physically. Even if they lost their lives in this world their Savior would be with them for eternity.

He's the one who suffered at the hands of sinful men – but more importantly he's the one who suffered for the sins of men. He forgave our sins by offering his perfect life as a sacrifice for us. He secured peace with God for us by shedding his blood. And God accepted that payment once and for all – raising Christ from the dead. And since God does not change, his declaration of forgiveness and peace with him stands forever. That means that even the threat of death cannot separate us from the unchanging love and grace of God.

Throughout history the Lord has been with his people, strengthening them, encouraging them, forgiving them, and receiving them to glory. The timeless words of our text first proclaimed that God would be with us in the future. Now that the future has become the present we rejoice in the fact that God's promises to us still stand and we gladly point out to others that they will stand in the future.

Confidently we place our futures in the Lord's gracious hands confident of his forgiveness, confident of being with him for eternity. Those are the promises our Lord has made to us. **He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.**" (1 Samuel 15:29 NIV) What comfort and security are ours in the ever changing situations in our lives because Jesus Christ is the same old, same old! May we never tire of enjoying the blessings of his grace as we seek to serve him here in time!

The opening portion of our text provides us with instructions and encouragements for our life of faith. On the surface each of these seems difficult and challenging, maybe even impossible, until we realize that with God nothing is impossible. He is the one who will enable us to respond to his unchanging love with our loving acts of service. And so our text begins this way: **Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters.**

Two thoughts come to mind as I think about this verse. First of all we are to consider each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Each of us by God's grace has been adopted into his family through faith in Christ Jesus.

Sadly the devil often likes to get fellow Christians to engage in a not so friendly game of the family feud in an attempt to divide and conquer the household of the Lord. It's no wonder that our text reminds us to keep on loving each other. That's the second thought that comes to mind. Love is an action. **Love is being kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven us.** (Ephesians 4:32 NIV) It's **Bear(ing) with each other and forgiv(ing) whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgiv(ing) as the Lord forgave you.** (Colossians 3:13 NIV) It's working together in love for a common goal – giving glory to our Savior God by teaching and following his Word.

Our text speaks of practical expressions of love. **Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.** Perhaps the writer of our text had Abraham and Lot in mind as individuals who showed hospitality to strangers and later discovered that their guests were heavenly messengers. The point is that we are to receive strangers in the same way we would receive a heavenly messenger.

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In times of persecution and flight, but also in connection with necessary travel, the Christians who first received this letter may well have found themselves in situations where they would be dependant on fellow believers for food or shelter – such strangers could be entertained with a simple show of cheerful hospitality which shared some of the basic necessities of life.

Today it is more likely that a stranger will come to our family at Good Shepherd because they have willingly moved or relocated, or because they are visiting the community for a weekend, or because they have a curiosity about our congregation or maybe because they are searching for the message of the Gospel which proclaims God's love to them. We owe them a friendly welcome – a welcome expressed in our helpful concern and a welcome which reflects the Lord's love.

Jesus mentioned that the poor and the needy are to be objects of our hospitality in our Gospel lesson today. Our text calls attention to another often neglected group of people as it reminds us to **remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering**. Many of the individuals the writer of our text had in mind may have been in prison or mistreated simply because they were being persecuted as Christians. Depending on the circumstances the Hebrew Christians might have been able to remember these individuals with food, clothing, medical care or spiritual encouragement. Some might have been in a position to work for their release or relief. They could, no matter what, pray for them.

There may be similar opportunities for us to pray for or work with individuals who are living in various institutions such as prisons, nursing homes, hospitals. There are opportunities for us to show love and concern for fellow Christians whose lives have been devastated by tragedy. And just as the Lord's love and compassion and concern for them never changes...so the Lord's commands to entertain and to remember those in need never change. Our hospitality is one way of serving our Lord while we wait for him to take us to glory.

Another way to serve our Lord is by honoring his gifts to us and using them as he intends. The gift of marriage is certainly a gift that is not always appreciated and honored today. It was no different at the time of our text. Sexual immorality of various forms was rampant among the Gentile population. And among the Jewish population many did not look at marriage as a life-time commitment. They showed their lack of respect for marriage by condoning or enjoying easy divorce.

Times haven't changed for the better, have they? We still deal with these situations today. In fact it's so easy for Christians to get caught up with the spirit of the times that they too find themselves excusing or maybe condoning unscriptural divorce or sinful sexual relationships. We speak of affairs, we speak of living together before marriage – these acts aren't often regarded as making a mockery of marriage or as the sins that they are.

The times may have changed but God hasn't. And neither has his will for marriage and faithfulness and sexual purity: **Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.**

And here's another one of God's unchanging commands that is needed just as much today as it was when our text was written. **Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.** Keep away from greed – do not desire what you cannot have; these thoughts reflect the commands against coveting. Put positively: be content with what you have. In spite of the wealth that most of us enjoy, we find it difficult to be free of greed and to be content. Now consider the fact that these words were written to people who property and goods had been confiscated. That puts a whole different twist on things, or does it?

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Whether we find ourselves being persecuted or in economic straits or whether we find ourselves comfortable and looking ahead to a future of financial security, don't we live by the promises of God – who has declared never will I leave you. That's the secret of contentment in any and every situation isn't it – the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord and relying on him to give us the strength and blessings we need.

When it comes to God and his love for us in Christ, it's always the same. May we resist the temptation to consider this sameness to be boring – as we continually look to the Lord for his unchanging love, forgiveness, compassion, and blessings – gladly living according to his will and serving him as we wait for him to take us to Glory.

**Because**

**Theme:** Jesus Christ Is Always the Same

1. You can be glad that you can serve him here in time
2. You can be assured that you can trust him to eternity

Amen.