

Good News for Tough Times

[Text - Hebrews Chapter 11]

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In today's New Testament reading, the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds a wide-spread community of believers [and us] of the tremendous bond that is shared by people of faith around the world, and throughout the generations. From Abraham to Moses, through the Matriarchs, Patriarchs and Prophets, the author traces this continuous stream of people, whose lives and faith have helped shape our own. And while you and I may not feel a particularly strong connection with Abraham or Sarah, Barak or Jephthah [whoever *they* were], we can certainly feel the continuing connection - and influence - of the departed members of our own families, and of this Family of Faith.

If I may state the obvious: "none of us would be here today if it wasn't for our parents!" That's right! And there are other people whose influence brings you and me to this particular time and place. This church wouldn't be here today, if it wasn't for the faithful members who came before us. You and I wouldn't be involved with this church, if it wasn't for all those other wonderful people who helped shape and guide our lives - people who showed us what Divine Love actually looks and feels like. So today, in honor and memory of those saints who touched our lives, let's consider how you and I can continue to share that same gracious love with others.

We are two days before the culmination of yet another extremely contentious election. Every day, we are exposed to the negativity of meanspirited political ads - from both sides. Every week we are bombarded by what seems like an endless stream of tragedy and horribly bad news. So this morning we are going to focus on and celebrate the *Good News*: the Good News of a Divine Compassion and Grace which has carried - and will continue to carry - people of faith through truly troubling times and tribulations. Today we will celebrate and soak-in the Compassionate Holy Spirit - that Spirit which transcends any differences or distances that make us feel disconnected. The Holy One who holds us together, and holds us secure, in spite of the dangers or difficulties we might face. But that's not all.

This morning, through our eating and drinking together at the Table of Grace, and by joining our hands in our concluding Circle of Blessing, you and I are also provided *physical* reminders of that spiritual Presence and connection. And the truth is, this physical dimension is a crucial part of our Faith, and it's an essential part of what this Community of Faith has practiced from generation to generation. Our calling isn't to simply *talk* about the wonderful welcome of Jesus Christ; it's to graciously extend that welcome to all those who need our help, support and care. We not only gather *in* a sanctuary to offer our praise to the Holy One, we also gather *as* a sanctuary, to offer hope and protection to the hurting and vulnerable people around us.

In the person of Jesus, you and I are given a phenomenal example of how to actively live for the sake of others. Jesus' tremendous faith in Divine Compassion and Graciousness inspires and empowers him to feed the hungry, heal the sick, free the oppressed and welcome the outcast. His deep trust in Divine Unity and Openness helps Jesus connect with the lives of others - especially those "others" who don't quite fit the proper picture of religious respectability. His Faith moves him to take *action* on behalf of those people who need it the most. And his faithful actions inspire those who follow him to act and live and grow together as a community of "saints" - a faith-filled, world-wide family which even today continues to do amazing things to encourage and enhance people's lives.

Faith, for Jesus Christ, is a way of life. Faith *in* Jesus as the Christ - the Anointed One - is also a way of life. It starts with others - parents, grandparents, teachers, friends - people who tell us the story of Jesus, and show us the abundant love which he embodies. That story and that love then take hold of our lives, and stirs-up in us the same kind of compassion and grace which are found in Jesus - inspiring and empowering us to feed the hungry, heal the sick, free the oppressed and welcome the outcast. That's what it means to be a Saint. It doesn't mean that we are amazing, "super-human" people - it means that we are very human people, who trust in the amazing Love of our Divine Source. And the more you and I learn to trust that we are completely loved and ultimately secure, the more we will be willing to give ourselves for the sake of others - to graciously pass-on that Good News, just as others have passed it on to us! And, God knows, we can all use more good news today!