

Rappahannock Christian Church – 3/6/11
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

This Wednesday is Ash Wednesday. So, today is the last Sunday before Lent, which is the season in the life of the Church when we begin looking forward to Easter. Christmas was a couple of months ago. Lent and Easter are coming. But right now we're in that "in-between" time. As we think about Jesus, the time in-between the birth and the death and resurrection is... well, it's Jesus' LIFE! All those things that Jesus said and did. It's the in-between time; it's Jesus' life, which we are supposed to imitate day by day. As we come to this Table and take these elements of Bread and Cup in hand, we are reminded of Jesus' sacrificial death for us. Surely we are also supposed to be reminded of Jesus' life -- a life like no other that has ever been lived! We remember it and we re-dedicate ourselves to imitating and serving Him always.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 - The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

"The Next Generation"

2 Peter 1:5-15 - For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.

All of us want to see our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews grow and succeed in life. We want to see them use their talents for useful purposes, making a valuable contribution to society. I suppose it doesn't have to be our own biological children, either. Perhaps it is our students, or the neighborhood kids, or the church youth that we care about. We like to see them showcase their talents -- dancing, singing, winning the

race. Maybe they are elected President of their class in school. We see them get a good education, enter into a successful marriage, or career. We are proud of them, and we like to brag about them. You know what I'm talking about!

Here in 2 Peter we see that Peter has a relationship with a group of Christians. He wants to see them succeed. This is natural. He is a church leader. He is an Apostle! Maybe Peter himself "won" these people over to Christ and to the Church. Perhaps he has taught them and encouraged them in the Way of Christ. Maybe he has trained them to be leaders in the church?

What successes does he want to see them have? Well, he doesn't say. They could start churches, win others for Christ, write theology textbooks, teach a Sunday School class. He doesn't seem to concentrate on the specific works he would like to see them accomplish. Instead, he writes to them about the personal characteristics he would like them to develop in life. He mentions such qualities as goodness, faith, self-control, brotherly kindness and love.

I find it especially interesting that what he says is he wants to see them have these qualities "in increasing measure." If they have these qualities in increasing measure they will be productive, effective Christians. I don't want to read more into this than I should, but it seems to me like he is saying, "Hey, I know you don't have all of these qualities in abundance (and who's perfect?!), but if you work at it, if you have these qualities "in increasing measure," then you're on the right track. At least I can see that you're improving!" (*And maybe someday I'll see some successes and accomplishments!*)

When I read this passage I also see that it isn't just about the Christians Peter has under his wing. It gives us a glimpse of Peter as a leader, an Apostle, a pastor, a shepherd. When he tells them what he wants to see in them, he says that he has done this before, probably on several occasions. Isn't that like a parent or teacher? In fact, he is almost apologetic about repeating himself once again. They already know that he wants to see them grow and mature in the faith. "But," he says, "it's okay for me to keep reminding you about these things because someday soon I will depart this earthly life. I will soon leave this body, this 'tent', behind. It was always meant to be temporary! The body is not a structure of brick and stone, built to last forever. It's just a tent. It's set up and inhabited for a little while, and then it's time to move on, and the tent is taken down."

The kind of relationship Peter has with his church folk is the kind of relationship that is repeated and repeated throughout history. Peter, after all (go read the Gospels!) was once the young, stupid disciple. Jesus was his teacher, his mentor. Now Peter is the old man. He is the teacher, the mentor. He knows that he doesn't have much time left.

So, he wants some assurance that his Christians will remember what he has taught them. He wants to know that, long after he is gone, they will still be "going strong" in the Lord.

If you don't mind, I have a few things I would like to say to Peter:

"The thing is, Peter, you can't know what these people are going to do years down the road. You can't know whether or not they will meet all the challenges that are coming, as you would like them to. All you can do is teach them what you know, give them your witness, live your life before God and beside them day after day and year after year. Teach that next generation the truths of God, and do your best to "walk the walk," and then you die. I'm sorry to be so blunt. But, Peter, those Christians coming along after you are in God's hands -- just like you have always been.

"Let me ask you a couple of questions, Peter. Do you think Jesus is able to save these people, and firmly establish them in the faith? You know he is! Do you think that Jesus is able use them to reach next generation and the next and the next? There is no doubt about it! Of course he is able!"

Christian friends, you and I are in the same position as Peter. We also are charged with teaching the next generation what we know about God. We are called to present, by our words and by our lives, a credible witness to the truth and power of the Gospel. We don't know what the results will be. All we can do is to do our best, and trust God for the outcome.

Benediction

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. - Eph. 3:20-21