

Prayer of Preparation: *Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift of all inspire, and have not love, my words are vain, as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.* Gracious God, show us how you would have us love one another. **Amen.**

How will we know that God is with us? Paul provides us with a map, a chart, and a diagram of how we have come to be people of faith and then Paul launches into something different...Paul starts talking about love.

At first I thought...this is odd. Why does Paul switch from talking about faith to talking about love? I mean, we know that God is love. But how do the two, faith and love, work together?

Paul has an answer for the Hebrews in the diaspora, and for us too. Here it is: scripture is all about love. In fact, scripture has hundreds of references of love. Scripture is full of people driven by love, people responding to love, and people obeying God in love. Scripture is the story of Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ the greatest act of love *for* us *from* God. Our faith is in Jesus Christ who died to pay for the sins of the world because of God's love for us.

How do we know that God is with us? That's the title to today's Hebrew scripture lesson...*God is with us*. So, how do we as people of faith know that God is with us?

Paul answers the question for us: we know God is with us when we love one another. When Paul says, *let mutual affection continue*, Paul is telling us that God is with us when we can love one another. When we look around and see one another as God sees us: precious, one of a kind, made in God's image, and loved, we know God is with us. But there's more...and Paul is good enough to provide examples.

Paul gives us a roadmap to help us show each other mutual affection. Scriptural hospitality means we are to provide food, housing, and care for one another...as God has provided these for us. Here's the thing, everyone is included in hospitality: friends, family, strangers, loved ones, enemies. EVERYONE.

Paul goes on to remind us of prisoners...remember those in prison. We are called to care for prisoners just as surely as we are called to care for someone who shows up at our doors. Paul is familiar with prison because he was there...locked up yet not forgotten. Most of Paul's life was spent in prison so Paul's plea was 2 fold...remember me and remember all the people like me. Send us letters, food, clothing...all those things we need to survive in body and in spirit.

Paul also says *let marriage be held in honor by all*. This means the couple, their families, and the community honor marriage. I can't say enough about how sacred marriage is and how it needs to be treated as such. Today weddings take priority, and marriage is treated as a temporary situation with little to no respect for the vows the couple speak to each other. That's not love, says Paul. Marriage is more than the wedding day...marriage is a lifetime commitment in which the couple, family, and community attempt to out love each other.

Paul has even more advice for us: advice on money and contentment, advice on remembering to pray for our leaders, and advice on continuing to be grateful for all God has given us. But the greatest piece of advice Paul gives us is this...God is with us and we should demonstrate it to each other and to the world. Here's how Paul says it, *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God*.

Do good...wherever you can, whenever you can, and with as much love as you can muster. That's how we will know God is with us. That's how the world will know God is with us. People today are always looking for a sign when the sign is us, the people of God, doing love for the world. And, it doesn't have to be big and

splashy; soft and gentle is just as effective. But make no mistake, we are ***required*** to be love to the world. That's how we, and the world, will know God is with us.

Response to the Word: *Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control, our spirits long to be made whole. Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.* May we be found being love to each other and to the world. ***Amen.***