

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:13

Epistle Reading: 1 John 4: 7 - 21

And now Lord God may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be pleasing and acceptable in Thy sight our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “celebrate the past”? I am truly curious and I would love for some of you all to come visit with me after worship and let me know what you think of. For me, I think of a few different things. I think of joyful experiences. I think of camping trips with my dad, trips to Disneyland with the whole family, I think of quality time spent with my beloved grandmother and her listening to me practice piano. I think of failures and lessons learned. I still remember getting into a random verbal spat and yelling match in middle school with my very best friend since kindergarten Andrew. It was, for all intents and purposes, a fight without the fists and within a day or two it was forgotten and things were back to normal. And the lesson learned was “don’t sweat the small stuff”. I couldn’t tell you what we were fighting about. I think of the multiple times I’ve been held accountable in work experiences and real life and how I’ve learned to accept constructive, reasoned criticism and differentiate that from “squeaky wheel” whining and complaining. Celebrating the past for me means remembering all that I’ve been through, good, bad, hard, easy and everything in between and how it has all shaped me into who I am today. Celebrating the past for me means accepting that things change and what I’ve learned and experienced equips me to be able to adapt to those changes.

I would dare say that celebrating the past looked very similar to the Hebrew people. If you picked up a large print copy of the order of worship, I encourage you to look back at our call to worship. God commands the people, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” They too, when remembering the past, were commanded to think of the joyful experience of freedom from enemies who had imprisoned them *and* to simultaneously remember the much less savory experience of being enslaved. They were commanded to remember the 40 years they wandered in the desert and they are to further remember, specifically, that God was with them throughout their entire journey. They are to remember that even despite their wanderings, God did not abandon them nor forsake them. They are to remember being thirsty for water and hungry for food and not trusting God. They are to remember the golden calf which bleeds into the next section of the call to worship in

which they are called to remember how their disobedience tested God's patience. And ultimately, they are called to remember God's steadfast, never ending love. Through thick and thin, God has neither abandoned nor forsaken them, but continues to abide with them. Embracing the past means remembering all the things, the victories and triumphs, the setbacks and failures, and most importantly the steadfast love of God who has helped you get to where you are today.

If that is what it means to celebrate the past, what might it mean to embrace the future? This is, admittedly, going to be difficult as we all know that change is hard but what's more is that there is very little about the future that is set or certain. A mentor of mine back in Virginia, Jim, warned me as I headed off to seminary, people don't want truth, they want certainty. There is hardly anything certain about the future. Unless there is. Jesus said he is returning. I cannot tell you when or how or if said return is imminent, but I can tell you for certain that one way to embrace the future is to expect Jesus' return. How do we live then like we are expecting Jesus' return? Short answer: love. The Hebrew people were told to celebrate the past by remembering God's steadfast love for them. Jesus' defeat of death occurred because of God's great love for all of creation. If the past and remembering has been about love, then does it not stand to reason that way forward, the way to live like we are expecting Jesus' return is also to love? We celebrate the past, remembering God's love and care and our love and care for one another, and all that to propel us forward into embracing the future.

Now, faith, hope and love abide, these three. And the greatest of these is love. One of the constant refrains I've heard from long time members of this congregation has been how it felt like a giant, extended family. Do not families function by loving one another? Do not functional families, not dysfunctional, do not functional families love one another? I think of some of the "harder" examples like the Rickertsen's neither abandoning nor forsaking Sara. And the Homan's neither abandoning nor forsaking Sam. And Larry and Judy Moomey's adoptions of troubled kids. How about rebuilding this church building when it burned to the ground? Putting on a new sanctuary roof? Putting in a new HVAC system? Redoing numerous upstairs rooms to make them more inviting and kid friendly? I think of some of the easier examples of deacon's loving and caring for our homebound parishioners. I think of all the children this congregation has raised and loved and continues to raise and love new children. Is not love the way forward? Is not love how we embrace the future? Aren't there still numerous "hard" kids in our community similar to Sara and Sam and the Moomey's kids who need the kind of love that they have previously, and continue, to receive? Are there not numerous individuals in the care facility who would love for

someone to visit with them and talk? Are there not numerous kids in this community just waiting to be cared for, and loved on? If love is a huge part of how we celebrate the past, does it not stand to reason that, likewise, love will be how we embrace the future? “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is made whole in us . . . So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them . . . There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been made whole in love. We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

Love is what has carried this congregation through 150 years and what celebrating the past looks like. And love will carry this congregation forward through another 150 years as we look to embrace the future. Amen.