

+ Hebrews 13:1-8 + Love Speaks Confidently¹ + 14th Sunday after Pentecost + 18 August 2013 +

Reading his e-mails was sometimes like cracking a code. It was pretty straightforward when he spoke of side trips he was taking, different sites he was seeing, and different aspects of the culture he was enjoying. Yet you had to pay attention when he spoke of “friends” with whom he spoke about his “Best Friend.” He was teaching English in a place where English is not the first language, in a place where there were serious punishments for the public spreading of Christianity, in a place where he’d been told his e-mails would likely be read by some beyond his intended audience.

Teaching English, however, wasn’t the only reason he was there. After spending twelve years at our church body’s worker training schools, and now with a commitment to share the name of Jesus in his full-time calling, the young man was there to tell people about Jesus, his “Best Friend”. Even though there were so many things culturally, socially, and even legally stacked up against him, he still spoke confidently. His love for Christ could do nothing else. He was in that foreign country to meet “friends” and start conversations about Jesus, eventually gathering those “friends” for private Bible studies. He was there so that, through him, Christ’s love could speak.

Today God’s Word urges that **LOVE SPEAK CONFIDENTLY**. Recalling the words of Psalm 118, the writer to the Hebrews encouraged his readers—and us—to ***“boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?”***

As we take a closer look at the text before us, you’ll notice that the first verses don’t really mention speaking. Instead they start with love. Love speaks confidently because that is what love does. For a moment, look at the laundry list of all that love does.

Basically the whole list boils down to this: Love sees a need and then acts to help. Go right down the list from verse 1. Love loves your brothers and sisters like they really are brothers and sisters. Rather than treat them lovelessly, as we so often do, love remembers what that actually means. Love treats strangers lovingly as well. Love has compassion for those in prison, not judgment, because our judgment isn’t going to help them any. Love respects your spouse or spouse-to-be by putting God’s will ahead of your own desires. Love treats money and possessions in the same way, putting your wants last, and instead being content with what God has given.

Taking such a close look at how love shows itself makes it clear how far short we have fallen just letting our love be love. You can’t read through those first five verses without realizing how disgusting your pride is, without seeing failure after failure in yourself. Has every comment at every one of our congregational gatherings really shown love to everyone there? How humiliating it would be to find out that the frustrating guy, who didn’t go when it was his turn at the four-way stop, was actually an angel! How often haven’t you looked with disdain at those with a criminal record or those whose lives seem to go from one bad relationship or situation to another? How about those sins of lust and greed? God’s law pierces your pride and mine, doesn’t it? If you and I can’t even act with love, how are we ever going to have our love speak about Jesus?

Thankfully, it’s not my love that speaks or yours. It couldn’t be. By nature your love is only for yourself. That’s not love. That’s selfish arrogance. That means that anytime you do any of those good things mentioned, it’s actually God’s love living in you and showing itself. God doesn’t put himself into the shoes of the suffering and hurting and those going without in some imaginary way. He already did that physically. Jesus took on flesh. He took the shackles of the prisoner. He felt the hunger pangs of the starving. He took the mistreatment of the outcast, the pain of betrayal. God didn’t just imagine what it would be like to suffer. He did it. He showed us love to the utmost, laying down his life, and not just for his friends, but even for total strangers who hated his guts. That’s what sin had made you and me! Jesus died so he could remove your sin and selfishness, and he rose to live that you might live and so he can actually fill you with his love.

For a moment, think of all the people he filled with that love who then shared it. They shared it by what they did and what they said. That love with which Jesus filled them spoke naturally, and his disciples saw their own prisons and exile, torture and death, because love had to speak.

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from WELS Ministry of Christian Giving’s 2013 stewardship emphasis – “Christ’s Love, Our Calling – Love Speaks”.

Then their followers did the same. Love spoke from generation to generation in so many different ways and in the face of so many different challenges. Now that same love lives in you because that love did not die with Christ. Christ is risen, and his love still can't help but speak.

What greater way could love show itself than by sharing the solution to all the problems, not just some slight improvement? How could love do more than share the way to be forever free from all the problems of life by sharing Jesus and, in doing so, sharing heaven? Yes, I know there are times you and I have missed opportunities to speak confidently...but Jesus didn't. He not only proclaimed to us his love and forgiveness. He gave a promise. Why can we let our love speak even when it's dangerous, even when it's not popular? ***"For [God] himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. Therefore, we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"***

We are not on our own. ***"Never will I leave you."*** We are not vulnerable. ***"Never will I forsake you."*** That's where our confidence is. That's how you and I can live knowing the truth, knowing that ***"the Lord is my helper."*** What can anyone really do to harm you? The worst case scenario is that they either drastically change your life physically or end it, but in the end, that really doesn't matter, does it? It doesn't matter because you have confidence in the God who loves you and who will never, ever leave you.

There's a missionary in our church body whose house was ransacked by armed robbers. He was beaten senseless, his wife attacked, his kids traumatized, and his stuff taken. Even though they had to endure all that, that missionary and his family are still in that place still speaking the love of Christ. Why? Why would they stay? Through it all God was with them and still is with them. He actually strengthened their resolve in spite of all that. They see how much need there is for the gospel, and they will not be afraid, because those robbers couldn't really do any harm. Jesus is still with them, and they've got the eternal reward he earned for them waiting in heaven.

Compared to that, the dangers we face in our outreach efforts here seem pretty minor. The worst that's happened to me is getting cussed out by someone with a very mean-looking dog when they heard I was a pastor. For some of you, the stakes may be higher as a confident testimony to God's will could cost you smooth sailing in your family. It could mean tougher conditions at work or school. It could simply be a huge leap outside your comfort zone. None of those things are minor, yet the love God has put in you is much bigger. More powerful than any of those things is the message God has given you to share: ***"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid."***

Last week we were reminded how important it is to speak precisely—how vital speaking the truth is even though it's not always easy. People often don't want to hear it. They may try to intimidate you by showing how far from "reality" they think you are. They may try to make it difficult to defend closed communion or to call homosexuality sin, but don't worry about that. Leave all that up to God. Think about it this way. You don't have to defend God's Word, because it is God's Word. A famous preacher named Charles Spurgeon is credited with saying, ***"The Word of God is like a lion. You don't have to defend a lion. All you have to do is let the lion loose, and the lion will defend itself."***

So let ***"the lion"*** loose! Let love speak confidently. To encourage you, God gives you a whole host of fellow believers to learn from, people who have let love speak confidently. ***"Remember your leaders who have spoken God's word to you. As you carefully observe the outcome of their lives, imitate their faith."***

Think back to those in your life who were confident to share with you the truth no matter how challenging or even dangerous it might have been—whether Paul or Luther, Kappel or Duehlmeyer or Bitter or Waldek or Gumm. Perhaps it was your parents, who sacrificed so much to provide you with a place to hear and learn God's Word—supporting a church where you went to Sunday School and protecting your family time in the Word against all attackers. Maybe it was someone here, who took the bold step of showing up on your doorstep, not knowing if you'd have a mean dog and a foul mouth.

Maybe it was a friend who broached that topic that can be pretty uncomfortable. Maybe it was all those people over the years who sacrificed so much financially and physically and personally and who may still do so to make it possible for you to come here to hear love speak.

Now think of this. Right now, in this place at this time, God has filled you with his love and forgiveness that you can't help but show it. That love can't help but speak. So do it when you leave today. Do it when you go home and go to work and school. Let love speak with confidence, because the Lord is your helper. He will never leave you or forsake you. Amen.