

To His Faithful Saints

7th Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2015, Psalm 85:7-13; Ephesians 1:3-14
Reverend Doug Abbott

Introductory Words:

The Book of Ephesians is reportedly written by St. Paul. But biblical research believes that this epistle was written in the first century A.D. by an unknown author, someone very familiar with the writings of St. Paul. The author's writing style is quite different from all other letters by Paul. This letter serves as a condensed summary of Paul's knowledge of the Christian faith for use by early Christian churches as a foundation to their. This is a book of faith.

Moment of Prayer

Salutation: To the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus.

My message to you today is a simple one. Keep the faith.

What is the faith we are to keep? It is found in this faith book, Ephesians 1: 3-14. The purpose of this Epistle ascribed to Paul is to instruct the early Christian churches about their faith, since this was all new to them. This faith is also mirrored in recent developments in our society. And it is present in our United Church of Christ heritage and in our church today. We are surrounded by the ever present power and purpose of faith.

Recently, Joe Scarborough, host of the TV morning news program "Morning Joe", in a live broadcast, praised the way the congregation of the Emanuel AME church in Charleston, S.C.

responded to the killings of their nine church members, including the pastor, Rev. Clementa Pinckney.

Joe Scarabough exclaimed repeatedly that the response of love and forgiveness by the church members and families was the most profound demonstration of the Christian faith that he had ever experienced.

This past Friday morning, the current pastor of the church, Rev. Norvel Goff was interviewed on the same morning show. He is interviewed while standing in front of the South Carolina State House two hours before the Confederate flag was to be taken down. He was asked how the church and the families were able to respond the way they did.

Rev. Goff replied with the same loving calmness and conviction exhibited in all other interviews by church members.

“The church and stricken families are keeping the faith. It is in our faith and what we believe. God has created all of us equal, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we want to be forgiven, we must forgive. We are working together to keep the faith. We are going through a grieving process.”

Rev. Goff went on to say “that faith allows us to be our better selves. Faith allows us to overcome evil that is thrust upon us. This faith came from what they were studying in the Bible class. Faith is forgiveness. How we respond to things that are negative in our lives is the key.”

These words are exemplary for people of all faiths.

Their faith response has affected the course of history in our country. If their reaction had been different, the results certainly

would have been disastrous. The outpouring of angry violence would just get more of the same. Thank God for the congregation of the Emanuel AME church.

So let's have a brief Bible study of our own this morning.

This letter of Paul to the Ephesians is addressed to the saints who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Verses 3-14 are a summary of the essential basics of the Christian faith.

Briefly, here's what Ephesians is telling us about God's faith:

+Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord

+He has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.

+He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

+That we should be holy and blameless.

+He destined us in love.

+ He has freely bestowed his grace upon us.

+ In him we have redemption through his blood.

+ We have forgiveness of our sins.

+ He has made known his wisdom to us.

+ Through Christ, he has set forth his plan for the fullness of time,
TO UNITE ALL THINGS IN HIM.

God's plan for us is to know that he is all about uniting the world to him. Keep the faith. God is a uniter, not a divider.

Having faith in God means having the faith of God.

These verses are a well spring of meditation in the coming weeks of your life. To restore your faith in the down time of summer, take one of these verses at a time, be silent, and let it soak in. It is known that we become whatever it is that we are emulating, whether it be love, forgiveness or redemption.

I did this in preparation for writing this sermon. Around 3:00 a.m. last Thursday morning, I woke up with information streaming into my mind regarding these verses. It was so powerful that I had to get up and go into the kitchen to download these reflections onto paper. It sure saved me a lot of writing time on Friday!

God is holding the space of his faith for you. He is promising you to be heirs of his grace. Don't let the stresses of life or the divisiveness of this world overtake you. Start with God's redemptive energy and absorb it not only in your mind but in your heart.

We are in a faith community, in covenant with the United Church of Christ. Our focus as a church is to incorporate, to incorporate the faith of God in all we do. There is the reality of the individual faith of each one of us. There is also the reality of the corporate faith of the Wilton Congregational Church for the past 289 years. Let us remember the faith of this church.

Let me give one example that is part of our heritage as a Congregational Church.. In June, Pam and I with my daughter Wendy took a tour of the Harriet Beecher Stowe house in Hartford. Harriet was born in Litchfield, CT in 1811, the sixth of eleven children to Rev. Lyman Beecher and Roxanna. Lyman, a Congregational minister, was one of the best known clergyman in the first half of the 1800's, preaching anti-slavery sermons in

reference to the Missouri Compromise. All seven of his sons became ministers, and all of his daughters including Harriet were well educated and active in their faith.

Harriet became the most influential as author of Uncle Tom's Cabin which she wrote in 1851 and over time has sold over 10 million copies worldwide.

The anti-slavery manuscript came not only from the faith principles of her family but also from two crushing experiences in her life. Her mother Roxanne died when she was 5 years old. She got the loving care and mothering from the household kitchen servants. She got to know the black people as real people. At 21, she married Calvin Stowe, a theology professor at Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio where her father served as President. They had seven children. Her 18 month old son Samuel Charles Stowe died of cholera. Harriet later credited that crushing pain as inspiration for writing Uncle Tom's Cabin. These experiences helped her understand the pain that enslaved mothers felt when their children were taken from them to be sold.

Here in Connecticut we in the church have a rich heritage for the abolition of slavery, which was also advocated in Wilton.

Holding onto faith in what is right takes faith as it can be costly in facing the opposing forces challenging one's beliefs.

We are surrounded by God's faith in today's world. Look at what is happening now in our present time. Pope Francis is taking a tour of South America, a faith journey on behalf of the Catholic Church.

In Central Park yesterday afternoon, on the Great Lawn, 60,000 people attended a six hour Pentecostal evangelical revival for free, featuring Luis Palau, one of the world's leading evangelical leaders. Mr. Palau, from Argentina, started his ministry with the Billy Graham Crusade as a bi-lingual interpreter. Billy Graham helped him form his own ministry. Luis, an endearing soul, is 80 years old and has an apolitical message of faith. He tells the crowd that in accepting Jesus Christ, their sins would be forgotten – but remembered by their mothers-in-law.

So there is Christian faith of all kinds, in all places, and here locally. Ephesians proclaims that God is the uniter. His plan is to unite all things in him. So do not let the divisive forces in the world today get you down and have the upper hand. Counteract them with the faith of God who will make good on his promise. This will make you a better person too.