

Text: Proverbs 13: 14-20; Hebrews 12: 1-3

Title: The Purpose of Witness

Date: September 13 2009- Celebration of 50 year members

Years ago I ran across a little town that had the cutest little county church you've ever seen, white clapboard with picket fence, steeple, sitting on c corner lot next to a cemetery. You can tell that its' people rally keep it up. All is well until you walk inside and realize that there was something missing. No Bathrooms, no kitchen, no Fellowship Hall or Sunday school room- nothing to indicate that anyone would spend more than an hour there. And that is the point- for as far as I can tell the Mt Hope Cemetery church in all of its 150 year old history never housed an honest to God living congregation- for it was built to service the cemetery- and host the occasional wedding. There was only one regularly planned service a year- one that people came out of the woodwork for- and that was Memorial Day. Normal churches were empty that Sunday- for everyone was out at the little church. This is above and beyond the normal, let's go take care of the family plot type of activities. There was more going on here. I used to joke with my Lutheran and Methodist colleagues what the deal was- was this some form of ancestor worship? Don't joke was the answer I always got. And I've got tell you- it creeped me out.

There are those traditions that venerate one's ancestors- Shinto comes to mind- but Christianity is not one of them. We do not look to our ancestors for guidance, for to do so borders on idolatry. The Bible gives us a better model, examples to follow, those who share their live experiences with the rest of us- which is why we celebrate those who have been with us for 50 years- and why we start with Proverbs.

Proverbs is a eminently practical book. How many of us, when we hear the word Proverbs, the image we get is the little slips of paper we get in Fortune cookies? The Book of proverbs is all about how to live a successful life. The Book divides humanity into 2 basic groups. There are fools. Fools are those who, in the words of Psalms 14 say *in their hearts that there is no God*. In other words, they live their lives as if there are no consequences to their actions, that their choices affect only themselves, and by and large they react to the world emotionally. No wonder their lives are a mess. On the other hand there are the wise. *The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*

*Proverbs 1:17* The wise know that there are consequences to one's actions, that our decisions affect many people because we are interconnected to one another; and that life calls for making informed, critical decisions- not bouncing from one emotional whim to another. Don't get me wrong- the life that God has designed us to live is filled with emotions *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control* and all the other fruits of the Spirit.

It is one of those truisms that Good decisions come from experience and experience comes from bad decisions. Ever been there? Think back, I am willing to bet that the most unhappy moments in all of our lives are when we are reeling from the effects of ours or even worse, someone else's bad decisions. But it works the other way as well- we can learn from other's wise decisions. Want to get ahead in life, study the ways for those who are doing well, who live lives of balance between their relationship with God and others, we see themselves as part of a network of relationships- see what they do and do the same. It's not rocket science- it's basically what the Book of Proverbs lays out.

Hebrews build on this foundations- and raises the ante. For all of the preceding chapter, the writer of Hebrews has been listing the Heroes of the Faith in the Old Testament, starting with Abel Enoch, & Noah, down through Abraham, Isaac & Jacob; Joseph, Moses and the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea; Samuel, David, and all of the prophets, noting how they acted in faith according to the promises that God made them. Not all of them had the full picture- but they trusted God anyway. Now, Hebrews tells us, we can add them to the list of those we can and should learn from.

Hebrews speaks of a cloud of witnesses. The image here is not of Abraham & Co looking down from the clouds commenting on our lives (God sees you! What a Buzz Kill) just the opposite- we are surrounded by the heroes of the faith who can bear First person witness of God's faithfulness, even when life is challenging. For the purpose of Witness, Hebrews tells, points us to Jesus. The aim of discipleship is to make us more Christ like- and to do that we do not have to re-invent the wheel.

Abel through the prophets have one distinct disadvantage- the only witness we have of theirs is contained in this book. There are others who surround us who can bear personal witness to the continuing cycle of life. I love how the Old testament puts it:

being given and taken in marriage- for that matter those times of wars and rumors of wars as Jesus puts it. There is another function of witness- in the sharing of life together we see each other age and we relive those times of God's faithfulness. Which brings me to Kelly and the Worship Committee. as we share the images of each other with each other our hearts are moved to thanksgiving- and thanksgiving is the heart of worship.

Introduce Kelly