

Let Us Share The Ministry

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[0 : 00] Our God and Father, grant that we may hear one another, that we may hear Thee. In Christ's name, Amen. The passage I'd like you to look at is the 13th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and it's found in your new blue pew Bible on page 212.

It's a lovely morning out this morning, and this is called Low Sunday, which isn't to describe your feelings, but really just the attendance at church.

And everybody feels so religious after Easter that they think they deserve a holiday from this kind of activity, so I'm grateful that you were all feeling guilty enough that you turned up this morning.

That's not altogether true and quite unfair, but I had an experience this week which was intriguing to me. An Indian who was tall enough to look me eyeball to eyeball came into the office and said that his name was Big Sorrel Horse, and that was a lovely name, I thought.

If he would only be ordained, he could be the Reverend Big Sorrel Horse, and that would be almost unimaginable. He came in and he told me that he wanted gas to get to Prince George, that he was from Alberta, that he had married a girl from Bella Coola, and wanted to get to Prince George, and needed the gas, and could I give it to him?

[1 : 56] Well, what would you do in that situation? I gave it to him. There's. But I phoned the Indian ministry downtown, and nobody was home, and so I had to figure out something to do, so I arranged to do it.

And he said, thank you very much, and went, and I presume is now in Prince George. The interesting thing about Big Sorrel Horse to me is that he knew what he wanted, and he came to the church to get it.

And having got it, he left. And you may think that that's a fulfilling ministry, but it's not.

I would like to have done a great deal more for him, but he knew what his specifications were. And one of the problems of the ministry is that you're often there only to provide people with what they want when they want it, and they seem to have good reason why you should give it to them.

And I felt he did, and so I did, and that's over. And here I am left trying to be a minister of the gospel.

[3 : 22] And it's hard work, because people don't particularly want that. There are some things that they will accept from the church. But the thing that I would long to give him, I just had no opportunity to give him.

And I find that that tends to be typical of ministry generally, that you get caught in that place where what you might long to give people, they don't want.

They may not even know you have it to give to them, but it's hard work. And I look at a parish like this, and I'm aware that we have some problems.

Problems that are highlighted by the fact that there's lots of people in church. And because there's lots of people in church, it's fairly easy to hide among the crowd, and neither to be ministered to necessarily, nor to share in the responsibility of ministering.

And how do you get around that kind of problem? Hebrews 13 tells us some of the things that should happen in a church.

[4 : 34] And if you want an interesting Bible study sometime, get yourself a notebook and a Bible, turn to the Epistle to the Hebrews, and look for the word L-E-T. And write down all the things that you're to let happen.

And so that the purposes of God can be realized in your life and in our life together as a congregation, we've got to let these things happen. In the 13th chapter of Hebrews, there is a number of things that we are to let happen.

We are to let brotherly love continue. That's to be the basis of the relationship. It's a relationship between all of us. It's not something that happens by accident.

It's something that happens by the grace of God at work in your heart. Brotherly antagonism comes naturally to you. Brotherly love is a gift which binds us all together.

Brotherly love is a gift that we are to let the church. Brotherly love is a gift that we are to let the church. The second thing it says in verse 4 is let marriage be held in honor. And the church is to be a community which honors marriage.

[5 : 50] Marriage is called an honorable estate instituted of God. And we are warned solemnly that what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

And so brotherly love is continued, is to be continued. Marriage is to be held in honor. Then in verse 5 it says, Let your life be kept free from the love of money.

You may not see that in your translation, but I found it in another translation. So you can add a let in verse 5 as well and allow it to read.

Let your life be kept free from the love of money and be content with what you have. And it's lovely that one of the great verses of scripture that most of us are aware of, I will never leave you or I will never fail you or forsake you, follows that.

That your life be kept free from the love of money and be content because, the Lord says, I will never leave you or forsake you.

[7 : 03] Brotherly love, marriage, contentment, free from the love of money. Then it says in verse 13, another let, let us go forth to him outside the camp.

Jesus was taken on Good Friday outside the city of Jerusalem and nailed to a cross on a hill shaped like a skull outside the city.

And you will find that devotion to the person of the Lord Jesus always puts you outside the establishment.

It always puts you outside the common social intercourse of men. It involves a certain shame to identify with Jesus Christ.

Seriously to identify with him. To say that you believe in him. To say that you trust him. To say that you take your stand with him involves you in stepping outside the usual strata of human society.

[8 : 14] And that's an important thing for us to be able to do. In verse 15 it says, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God.

That he's using the background of the city of Jerusalem and the temple and from the altar in the temple, the continual smoke of the sacrifices that are being made there is constantly going up as a kind of beacon in the center of the city.

So the writer to the Hebrew says, the praises of God must constantly be going up from the people of God. That you're constantly to be involved in the offering of a sacrifice of praise to God.

That's part of what our life together is as a Christian community. Well, those are the things that we are to let happen.

Brotherly love, marriage held in honor, life free from the love of money, identification with the person of the Lord Jesus at cost to ourselves, and a continual offering of a sacrifice of praise to God.

[9 : 39] Well, those are the things that are to mark our life together as a congregation. Now, part of my agony in coming to this particular sermon this morning is that I'm going away for two weeks with Fran, and I don't know how you're going to get along without me.

And I have left undone so many things that I would like to have done. You can keep busy and forget that, but when you have to break and go on a holiday, you suddenly realize how much you left undone that you would like to do.

And if this holiday was to be a permanent holiday and I didn't come back, I would like to leave behind those characters that I spend most of my week organizing them and getting them to go out and do the job.

There's one ordained minister that I have who's in charge of Bible study groups, and he has to work among them, forming them and seeding them and getting them going and encouraging new people into them and making sure that that happens.

And then there's another full-time minister who's in charge of Christian education, and he sees that that happens. And then there's another minister who's seven days a week, works among the alienated and indifferent members of the parish who never come.

[11 : 08] Then there's another full-time minister who takes charge of stewardship. He teaches tithing and freewill offering, and he sees that the church has everybody taught with regard to their responsibilities.

And then there's another full-time minister who simply organizes and coordinates music, liturgy, and worship. And then there's another full-time chaplain who works in the four hospitals that are in this parish and looks after all the elderly people who are shut-ins and can't get out.

And then we have another man who does full-time counseling in the parish for people with marriage stress and other personal problems. So I leave the job confidently in their hands, except, as you know, they don't exist.

There is no such person. And when I dream of some kind of power structure, I think wouldn't it be nice to have all those people to do all those things?

Well, it does seem a good idea, but it's just a kind of daydream, which I have as I sit in my office wondering what to do next, which of those hats I'll put on and try and wear it for a day.

[12 : 27] And then I decide that's useless, and I try another one. And so I go from being a counselor to being a chaplain to being a stewardship officer to being this, to being that, to being the other thing. And you know the old sailor my grandfather knew who had so many things that he wanted to do that whenever he thought it was time to begin, he couldn't because of the state he was in.

That's the state I'm in most of the time. Somebody has described a Church of England clergyman. This was in the Weekend Telegraph, and it's quoted by David.

It's quoted by David Watson in describing what an Anglican minister is, or who Anglican ministers are.

He says, They're a motley band of underpaid and generally frustrated men. They provide some of the most poignant casualties of the 20th century.

They are like armless lifeguards trying to save the drowning. They find themselves trapped in an archaic structure. There's nothing wrong with their message and very little wrong with them.

[13 : 39] Their methods of communicating are appalling. Well, that's the picture that you have, and it's a picture of helplessness of the person or persons who are at the center of the parish trying to carry on a ministry and dreaming of the day when there will be rows of offices and rows of people to do, rows of jobs, and everything will be done efficiently and well.

Well, it doesn't happen, does it? And so that the kind of things that need to be done aren't done.

The number of homes I haven't been into, the number of people on our parish list that I have never met, the number of people that I should have visited that I have never visited, mean that I go off on my holidays in a paroxysm of guilt about my failures, but they're not really mine.

They're yours, too. And it's because somehow as a parish, we're not fulfilling the ministry that needs to be fulfilled.

And you can look at it in terms of hiring more professionals. If a dentist has too many patients, he presumably hires another dentist. And if a doctor has too many patients, he presumably hires another doctor.

And a lawyer presumably hires another lawyer. But is that what happens in the church? I'm not sure that it happens. I'm not sure the church could ever afford to run that way anyway.

[15 : 18] We could be like a law firm and build up 70 or 80 partners, all working out of one office. And that wouldn't be bad, except it would take a wheelbarrow to take up the collection on Sunday if you wanted to support such an undertaking.

Well, you see, the difficulty is that the ministry belongs to all of us, to each one of us.

And we have to exercise those gifts which God has given us in fulfillment of the ministry that we have in this parish.

We have to be able to do that, to come to the place where we can do it. And how are we going to be able to do it?

Well, so often I, and I may have given to you this morning, a very discouraging picture of all the things that need to be done and all the things that haven't been done that ought to have been done.

[16 : 22] But there's another side to the story, and that is that in a wonderful way, things are happening. You do find, whether you believe it or not, you do find that there are marriages that are honored, that there is brotherly love that exists, not everywhere, that there is lives that are free from the love of money, that there are lives where people are not ashamed to identify themselves with a

personal faith in Jesus Christ.

We do find people from whose hearts there is a continual sacrifice of praise to God. Those things do happen, and exciting things are happening in this parish, not by reason of anything, except that certain people, at least, are beginning to get hold of the ministry they have as the disciples of Jesus Christ and to exercise that ministry.

When David Watson describes the Anglican minister as being a lifeguard with no arms, a kind of person with all the good intentions in the world, but no way of doing it, when he talks about him being trapped in archaic structures, one of the basic archaic structures that you get trapped in in the Anglican church, and perhaps in others, is that the minister is expected to do many things.

And the difficulty with that is that he's proud enough to think he can. And when you get a congregation that are happy to let him think he can, and a man that's pompous enough to think he can, you have a deadly combination for destroying a parish, because the structure just won't let anything worthwhile happen.

And what has to happen has to happen because of the way God works among us. And to get a picture of how that happens, I want you to look at verse 20 of Hebrews 13.

[18:40] And this is sometimes used as a benediction and sometimes as a prayer. And it says, the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that God is someone who affects peace where there is guilt and where there is inadequacy and where there is failure and where there is hostility and where there is misunderstanding.

This God is a God who brings peace, brings peace in relationship between people so that there can be brotherly love. So he is a God who is working to establish through Christ the grounds of peace. I saw when I was thinking this over, the picture on the front of McLean's, the ultimate weapon that all our whole society is working towards the ultimate war.

What God has done in Christ is to establish peace, peace which ultimately will not be denied by any weapons of war.

So this God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus to demonstrate his power, to demonstrate that, that is, the power of God over death and to demonstrate who his man was.

[20:05] This is Jesus Christ. Now, you know when they confuse, as one article in the paper said, Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi and all those people with Jesus, the distinction about Jesus is that God chose publicly to raise him from the dead and say, this is the man.

That's not to denigrate anybody else, but it certainly makes Jesus Christ stand out uniquely. And that's done because the God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus.

And the Lord Jesus, we're told, is the great shepherd of the sheep. And that is that he is the one that is able to take us through the valley of the shadow of death and to bring us out on the other side.

He is the one who is the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He is the one who has done uniquely for us what nobody else could do.

And so he is the great shepherd and we are to be followers of him. He is the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of an eternal covenant.

[21:24] Now there was the promise of a covenant that was to come. And in the Old Testament, Jeremiah talks about that promise that was to come and people looked forward to that promise.

But then one day on the cross, the blood was shed. It was poured out on the ground. It's why so much of Christian praise and worship centers around the blood of Christ because the blood is the sign of the fulfillment of the promise of God, the guarantee of the promise of God signed in blood that God will fulfill his promise to us.

So this God of peace who brought from the dead our Lord Jesus, who is the great shepherd of the sheep and has established this eternal covenant by the shedding of his blood, this God is at work in you and in me and in this congregation.

And what is he doing? He is equipping you with everything good that you may do his will. The word is one that refers to repairing fishing nets.

And you know what it's like to catch a great fish with a hole in your net. Well, that in a sense is how the church is described here.

[22:52] We're trying to do a job, but there is a hole in the net, so what we're trying to do always gets away on us. It slips out and we don't accomplish what we are meant to accomplish as a community of Christ's people.

We don't fulfill the ministry that we're called upon to fulfill. We don't do the work that we're meant to do. And what has to happen is that this God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of an everlasting covenant, is going to equip us with everything good that we may in fact do his will.

And that we may be a community where visibly you can see that the will of God is being done in the lives of people. And it's being done through the ministry of the whole congregation as they exercise the gifts they have in being the servants and disciples of Jesus Christ.

He equips you with everything good that you might do his will. Repairing what is broken. Restoring what is lost.

That's God's activity among us. And it says further to that that he is working in you that which is pleasing in his sight.

[24 : 26] And I delight in that verse because so many people are willing for God to work in us what is pleasing in our sight.

Big sorrel horse was pleased by getting a tank full of gas. That pleased him. But I don't think it pleased Jesus Christ in particular. There's something else needed there.

And I think a lot of us have our own little ambitions which we hope will be fulfilled. But what this God of peace wants to do is to equip you and to work in you what is pleasing in his sight.

What he wants to see done in your life. And I think you can almost guarantee that that's going to be slightly painful.

because our ambitions and God's purpose for us don't always come too close together. But what this God is doing is patiently working in us to fulfill that which is pleasing in his sight.

[25 : 40] Well, I want you to be aware of this. I want you to know that this is the ministry to which we are called in Christ and in which we are all to share, all to find those gifts which we are to exercise within the fellowship of the body of Christ which God is equipping in order that we can fulfill that task.

David Watson tells a story about a church in South China which hasn't had missionary in a city in South China which hasn't had missionaries for 25 years and that in a city of 400,000 people 50,000 of them have become Christians.

He says that it's possible to verify that statement. Well, there's a church that survived very well without missionaries. The fact is that a church probably will survive very well without ministers.

Once people learn to fulfill the ministry they have one to another. The responsibilities that we have to one another within the fellowship of Christ's church.

And then perhaps the whole thing can work together in such a way that we will see as a reality of daily experience brotherly love, marriages honored, contentment, people unashamed to identify with Jesus Christ, and a continual sacrifice of praise to God being offered.

[27 : 33] Let us pray. Father, work in us that which is pleasing in your sight.

Equip us for every good work that we might not just be a place that people pass through, but where people are built together into a fellowship of praise and thanksgiving to you.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. to enjoy as as I see in as as as as as as as as as as as as as