

“ENCOURAGE, ENDURE, AND ENJOY!”

2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

As I was sitting yesterday morning in my office at church, I had you all on my mind – Through the morning I was praying for you as the Spirit led me, but then I began to think of what I might share with you in my sermon this week.I was kind of easing into putting off working on this week’s sermon until later, but I decided to pray for some divine guidance from our Lord, and by golly I think he gave it – I prayed, “Lord, what do they need to hear this week? What Lord, do you want to share with us this week?” And then, just as clear as a bell, I heard 3 things: “Encourage, Endure, and Enjoy!” I thought, “Great!” Three points to my sermon already, and they all start with the same letter – Hard to go wrong there! And as I meditated on these 3 words, I realized that all 3 of these are really important topics during this COVID 19 pandemic, so let’s take a closer look at each of them: First of all – Encourage: I don’t know about you, but I need lots of encouragement. Maybe I struggle with some insecurity or an inferiority complex – or maybe it’s just the human side of me – The emotional side that needs lifting up from time to time. It is human-nature to need encouragement, the early Christians needed it, and I suspect you do too. We are commanded to encourage one another, because we all need it – But, why are we commanded to provide encouragement? I think it’s because it is not natural for us to do it for one another. The flesh finds it hard to be encouraging, so The Holy Spirit must make it into a command. Our scripture lesson this morning says, “Encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace.and the God of love and peace will be with you.” God’s word is saying, “If you want God to be with you, you need to encourage one another!” What kills relationships, be it a marriage, friends, or our church family is discouragement, negativity, and strife. Who wants to be around someone who is discouraging, petty, and negative? The way to win friends and influence people is to never condemn, complain, or criticize them – The scriptures tell us that if we have any encouragement from being united in Christ, any comfort from his love, any common sharing of The Spirit, any tenderness and compassion.Then make our joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being in one Spirit and one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourself – Not looking to our own interests, but to the interests of others! Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up. Encourage one another daily, as long as we have this “Today”, so that none of us may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness! I remember a time in my life, at the height of my addiction, my first response was always critical – Negative - My natural response was to see the negative of any circumstance. My first instinct, maybe as a type of self-preservation, was to look for a person’s weakness or fault, and then put them down for it. I had to build a life with our Lord, Jesus Christ, who taught me to find the positives, not the negatives, and this change in my perspective changed my life! I started evaluating what was coming out of my mouth, and I found it lacking – Unwholesome stuff was coming out of my mouth, and I found this disturbing – Destructive stuff was coming out – Hurtful words were pouring out of me – You see, I was coming from a sinful state where I didn’t trust people. My perception was that people sought to hurt me, and it was just better to avoid them. Then I was saved and born again in Christ, and Jesus turned my world upside down! I began to love people – I had to change my destructive behavior. I was used to discouraging people, so I had to watch what was coming out of my mouth. I had to build people up, I had to encourage people, not tear them down! I had to meet their needs, not mine! My words coming out of my mouth had to benefit those who were willing to listen! And I challenge you – Start inspecting your words and your actions. Are you destructive or constructive? Do you tear down, or build up? Are you encouraging or discouraging? Remember, our Lord commands us – If you want God in your life, we need to conform to this aspect of God’s nature, because Jesus is encouraging – And we need to be encouraging as well! “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement, give you the same attitude of mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had.” Romans 15:5: Apostles and pastors encourage, and the Bible encourages as well. Read the word of

God – It is there to encourage us! Learn the promises of God – Meditate on them – We are encouraged and this develops into hope, and hope is the foundation of our faith! But, start at the beginning, and encouragement is the start. Be encouraging to all, and be encouraging to yourself, by praying, reading the Bible, getting council and fellowship from your brothers and sisters in Christ! And we get encouragement so we can endure; you see they go hand-in-hand. From everything that was written to teach us – So, that through endurance we will provide encouragement and hope. May God give us endurance and encouragement so we can give the same attitude of mind towards each other that Christ Jesus had? Us Christians, we have to endure! The Bible doesn't teach the "Once saved – always saved" doctrine. We are told to endure. We are told to stand firm in our faith until the end. We are told to strive to be Christ-Like! Some people are going to be awfully surprised come judgment day, because they trusted in a false-doctrine, rather than in a loving relationship with Jesus. We must endure what Jesus taught us. Reminds me of a story – The pastor at a small, country church had just given a very long, boring sermon and his congregation was filing out of the church – most, not saying a word to the pastor. After a while, a male member shook the pastor's hand and said, "Pastor, that sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God." The pastor was ecstatic, "No one has ever said anything like that about one of my sermons before! Tell me, how did it remind you of the peace and love of God?" "Well", the man said, "It reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all human understanding, and it reminded me of the love of God because it ENDURED forever!" It is said in Matthew 24:13, "He who endures to the end shall be saved." Who is going to be saved? The one who endures to the end! If we endure, we will also reign with him – If we disown him, he will also disown us – There is always a blessing for enduring, there is always a reward. We need to hang on to that hope so we can endure. Set your sights on Jesus – as we are suffering and enduring it, look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Let us run with perseverance, the race marked out for us. Remember Jesus, for the joy set before him.he endured on the cross, scorning its shame, and now Jesus sits at the right hand of the throne of God – Jesus, the one who endured such opposition from sinners, so that we will not grow weary and lose heart. See, even Jesus had to endure suffering and pain – can we do anything less? When we are tempted, endure it. When we are persecuted, endure it. When we go through the fire, endure it. It will all be worth it, because when you endure, joy is sure to follow! Why did our Lord Jesus endure the cross? For the joy set before him after he endureth! Joy is one of the attributes of God – Our God is a God of joy! There is such strength in the joy of the Lord. God wants all his children to enjoy good food and drink. God loves to see his children laugh and dance and sing.This is the kind of God we serve – We have to learn and grow and mature, and part of this process is pain and sorrow and disappointment. But God gives us the promise – Those who sow with tears, will reap with songs of joy! Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them, (Psalm 126: 5-6). We need to know, that joy is coming – God delights in our joy, because our God is a being of joy, and the fruit of The Holy Spirit is joy, love, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. God wants us to know about love, but another aspect of God's nature is joy! There is joy coming for us! There is joy in our future. In 1 Peter 5:4 it says, "When the chief-shepherd appears, we will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away!" And Romans 8:18 reminds us, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Joy comes to us in the morning folks – It'll be worth it – Has this COVID 19 pandemic got you down? Remember, that our current suffering we're experiencing will pass – That the love of our Lord Jesus Christ will triumph over fear and hate. And remember our formula for excellence.Encourage, Endure, and Enjoy! It works – May God give you encouragement in this troubling time – Which will help you endure this trial – And bring you into the life that can enable you to enjoy the love of Christ which surpasses all understanding! We pray this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.Amen!